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Calvin Profs affirm the 'Grand Evolutionary Hypothesis' for Christians in the Reformed tradition

Ron Rupke

Two religion professors at Calvin College have published articles claiming that recent scientific discoveries clearly show mankind did not descend from a single pair of human ancestors, and that there was no historical fall into sin. The articles by Dr. Daniel Harlow, professor of biblical and early Jewish studies, and Dr. John Schneider, a professor of Theology, appear in the September 2010 edition of the scholarly magazine *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith.*

In an article titled *After Adam: Reading Genesis in an Age of Evolutionary Science*, Dr. Harlow asserts that recent research in molecular biology shows that the present diversity of the human population cannot possibly be descended from a single couple living in Mesopotamia several thousand years ago. He advances the opinion that Adam and Eve are strictly literary figures – characters in a divinely inspired story about the imagined past that intends to teach primarily theological, not historical, truths about God, creation and humanity.

He shows how this view of the first few chapters of Genesis allows us to appreciate the narrative in a new way. The talking snake is a trickster figure representing disorder in God's well-ordered creation – or, on another level, an embodiment of autonomous human reason opposing innocence and obedience. The two distinct accounts of creation, in Genesis 1:1-2:3 and in Genesis 2:4b- 25, do not have to be forced into harmonization, but may be separately appreciated for the distinctive theological message

Harlow argues that science undermines the historicity of Genesis.

of each. When the Lord pronounces judgment on Cain after he murders Abel, we do not have to wonder why he expresses fear that "anyone who meets me may kill me," wonder where his wife came from, or wonder who could populate the city he builds. Dr. Harlow dismisses traditional answers to these gaps in biblical narrative as "desperate attempts to salvage the historicity of the story [which] go against the plain sense of the text, whose details strongly hint that it is not reporting historical events but picturing paradigmatic ones."

Dr. Harlow also outlines other scientific studies showing that virtually all of the acts considered "sinful" in humans are part of the natural repertoire of behavior among animals. He concludes that, "far from infecting the rest of animal creation with selfish behaviors, we humans inherited those tendencies from our animal past." In the last few paragraphs of his article, he argues that evolutionary biology reinforces a Christian sense of the inevitability of sin and human inability to overcome the inherited tendency to sin. Seen from a theological perspective, this points to the absolute necessity of God's grace in Christ, both to forgive sin and to transform sinful human beings into new creatures whose lives conform to the image of Christ.

Another Copernicus?

Dr. John Schneider's article offers what he calls exploratory proposals answering the question "what sort of genuinely Protestant theology could be compatible with the narrative of human evolution?" He compares the conflict between evolutionary theory and scripture with the situation faced by churches when Copernicus proposed the theory that the earth turned around the sun, rather than the sun around the earth. Catholic and some Protestant theologians found the idea to be almost unthinkable. Protestant leaders such as Martin Luther

See **Profs** *on page 2*

South Sudan secession good news for Christians

Walter Miedema

Africa's longest armed conflict might finally be ending. In the second week of January, those living in southern Sudan held a referendum to decide whether to become an independent nation and formally cede from the north, where the government seat is currently located. The North-South conflict runs deep along geographical, ethnic, economic and religious lines.

Throughout Sudan's existence as an independent nation, the Islamic northern portion of the country and its southern Christian counterpart have lived in tense coexistence. The

99.5 percent of South Sudanese voted to split from the North.

resource-rich south has frequently sought independence, but the north prefers to keep the country unified and to maintain control.

Even before the country's official independence from Egypt and the UK was declared in 1956, civil war was imminent. The country's history has been dominated by two civil wars, the latter lasting almost 22 years and officially ending in 2005. During this time, admitting to being either a Christian or Muslim could get you killed in certain areas of the country. That war may officially be over, but guerrilla warfare has continued until recently, most well-known in the Sudanese region of Darfur, an area the size of Spain on the country's western border.

The beginnings of last month's week-long referendum came out

See **Sudan** *on page 2*

News

Profs *continued*

first scoffed at the theory because it didn't fit well with a literal reading of some Bible passages. Catholics resisted Copernicus' ideas because they contradicted the teaching of established authorities from Aristotle right through to Augustine and Aquinas.

However, leading Protestant theologians who knew their science, supported by the work of Protestant astronomers, led Christians in the Protestant tradition to understand that key Bible passages describing the movements of the sun, moon and stars are not to be read as science.

By contrast, the Roman Catholic tradition took much longer to give up Aristotle's teaching of an earth-centered universe. Happily, according to Dr. Schneider, lessons the Catholic tradition learned from the experience have allowed modern Catholic scholars to lead the way to rethinking doctrines of a historic Fall and original sin in light of recent discoveries in genomic science. Meanwhile, Protestant practice has "cemented the historical Fall into the foundations of confessional doctrine and theology."

This means that traditional Protestants lack the intellectual tools needed to meet the challenge to faith presented by scientific proof that humans have animal ancestors.

Next, Dr. Schneider outlines the kind of Protestant theology that might answer the question posed at the beginning of his article. It would have to discard Lord's Day 3 and 4 of the Heidelberg Catechism, and article 14 of the Belgic Confession. It would have to read the first chapters of Genesis in the manner suggested by Dr. Harlow. It would offer a historical-critical approach to the scriptures instead of assuming biblical inerrancy. There is no room for eternal damnation, and Eden would not be the original state of creation, but the beginnings of God's vision for the new heaven and the new earth. Finally, in answer to the accusation that an evolving creation would make God the author of evil, Dr. Schneider offers the theology of the book of Job. When Job is allowed to see God in the tornado, he finds God to be in complete command and mastery of the otherwise uncontrollable, chaotic situation. Seeing things in this way, Job requires no further explanation. He repents and withdraws his bitter accusations, satisfied that they have been resolved. Dr. Schneider dubs the theology outlined here an "aesthetic supralapsarianism."

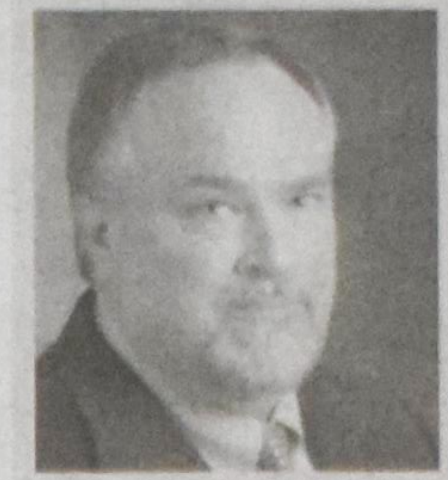
Dawning implications

Faculty at Calvin College are required to teach and to write in accordance with the Reformed confessions. Although both articles display a deep knowledge and respect for those confessions, the theology they propose is accurately described as "nonconcordist." In a final note at the end of his article, Dr. Harlow explains, "In this article my purpose has not been to undermine the Reformed confessions. Taking them seriously requires engagement with literary, historical and scientific issues that were unknown to their framers."

Calvin College President Dr. Gaylen Byker has publicly criticized the publication of these papers, and promised a communal discussion of the issues raised in them on the Calvin College campus. According to an article published in the Calvin College *Chimes*, many faculty members there, particularly in the science department, will welcome the discussion between scientists and theologians.

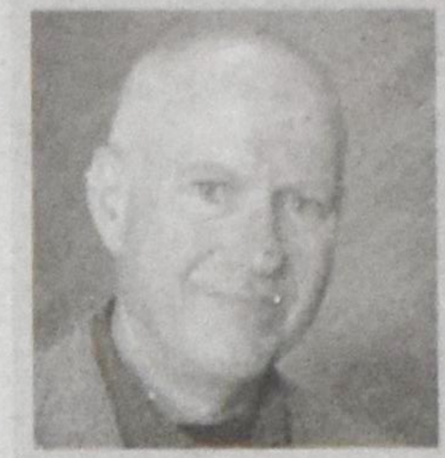
As one raised from infancy through university in the scriptures as interpreted through the reformed confessions, I had to suspend my disbelief in order to read and understand what Drs. Harlow and Schneider are saying that science compels us to believe. Have I really been blinkered by my schooling in the reformed confessions? Is that the reason why I find the position of Intelligent Design much more compelling than the grand evolutionary hypothesis? Must I now accept the tenets of what I have always thought to be a naturalistic rather than a biblical worldview? I suspect that many *CC* readers will hope, as I do, that Christian scientists at Calvin College and elsewhere will help us to answer these questions.

Ron Rupke lives in Cobourg, Ontario.



Primary texts:

Dr. Harlow's article, "After Adam: Reading Genesis in an Age of Evolutionary Science" can be found at **asa3online.org/PSCF/2010/08/20**



Dr. Schneider's article, "Recent Genetic Science and Christian Theology on Human Origins: an 'Aesthetic Supralapsarianism,'" can be found at **asa3online.org/PSCF/2010/08/05**

For an interview with Al Wolters about these articles, see page 3.

Sudan *continued*

of the truce brokered in 2005. The voter turnout was over 90 percent of the population. In fact, some districts' results were suspended because over 100 percent voter turnout was reported. The results of the vote were officially announced on January 25, with the overwhelming majority voting to form a separate Southern Sudan. The official results of the referendum are also considered legitimate by a body of foreign observers. The official separation is set to occur on July 11 of this year.

Call for forgiveness

It is, however, impossible to know whether independent guerrilla forces will respect the decision of the South Sudanese people. During the long years of war, many southern Sudanese suffered at the hands of their northern neighbours. Many were forced into slavery and starvation. The instability also made it difficult for missions and development agencies such as The Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) to properly aid farming families in the fertile south. During and since the referendum, however, the atmosphere has been remarkably peaceful.

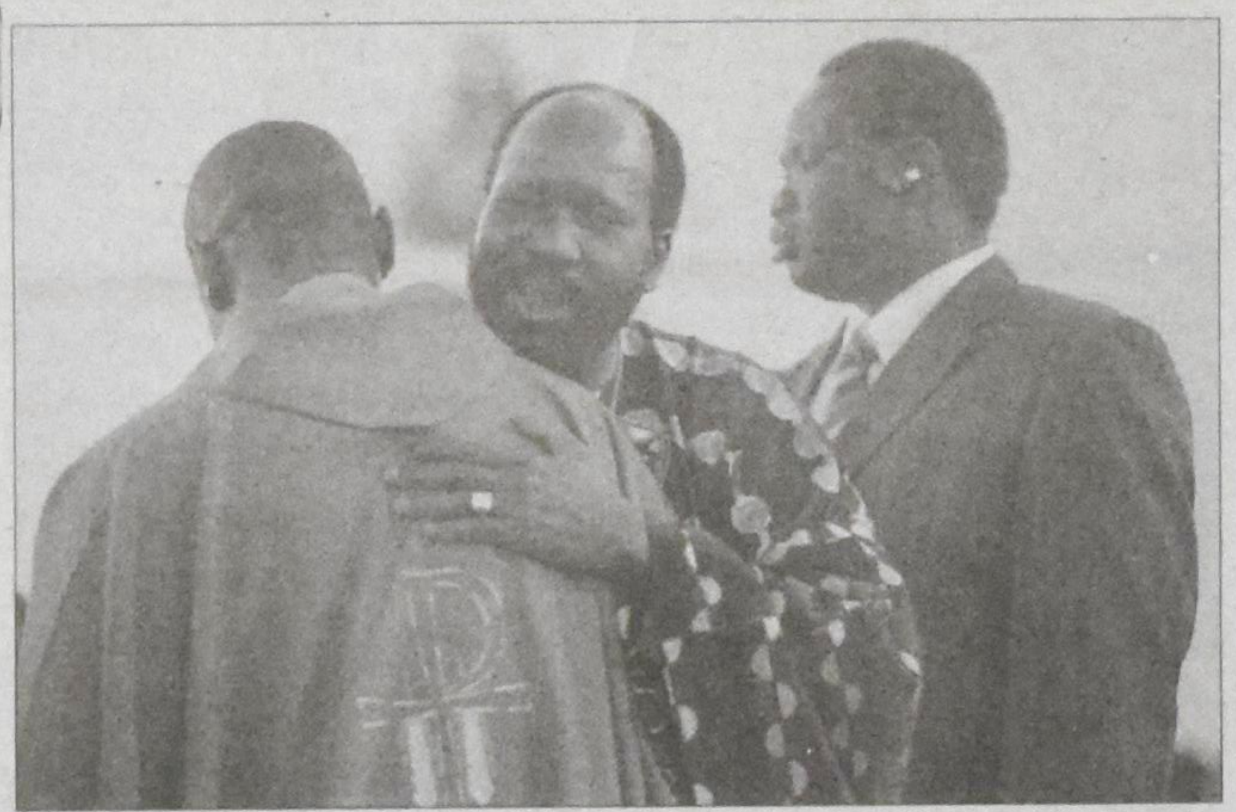
In an astonishing move, Salva Kiir, the political leader of the new South Sudan, has called for the Southern Sudanese to adopt an attitude of forgiveness, suggesting that they should adopt the attitude of Christ as he was being crucified. He made this statement from within a Catholic church. Kiir has also been pictured embracing the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Juba, one of Southern Sudan's larger cities.

Omar al-Bashir, head of the northern Islamic regime and Sudanese president since 1989, has also made surprising statements of respect. al-Bashir has made it clear that he would prefer that Sudan remain one united country, but that his government would respect the south's right to cede. To what extent the al-Bashir regime is willing to let South Sudan rule itself, and whether the north will step in if the south seems unable to control its territory remains to be seen.

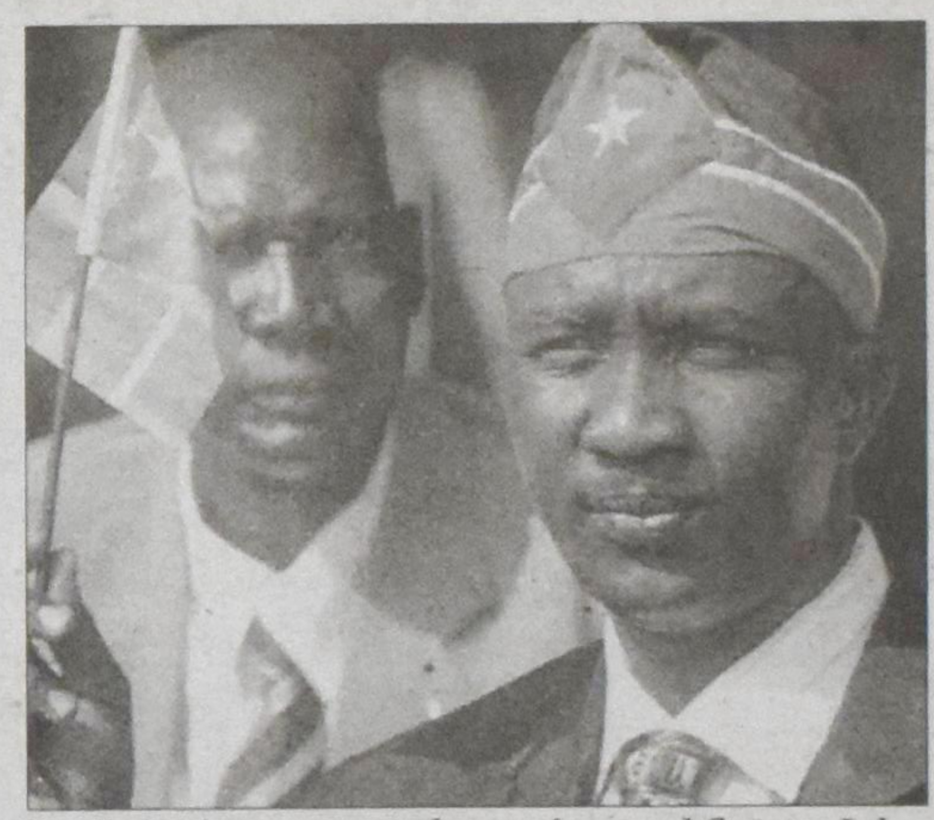
Conflict will almost surely occur along the border between the north and south. Hopefully this will not stop the creation and growth of a stable Southern Sudan. The division of states and the relative peace that surrounded the process suggests that the referendum's outcome will lead to a greater sense of stability in an area that desperately needs a chance to breathe so that its people can once again thrive.

The division of Sudan into two nations will almost certainly benefit Sudanese Christians. It increases the amount of attention being paid to the region, and establishes an official government with close ties to the church. With a renewed right to defend its citizens and stabilize its own economy, the South Sudanese infrastructure has a chance to improve, so that the work of mission agencies and the local church may have a lasting impact. Those currently living as refugees will also be able to return home and rebuild their communities.

Walter Miedema (walter.p.miedema@gmail.com) lives and writes in Vancouver, B.C.



South Sudan President Kiir hugs Catholic Archbishop Lukundu.



South Sudanese man dons a hat and flag in Juba.

Women wave a South Sudan flag as they wait to cast their vote in Juba.

Five challenges for the new country:

Besides picking a name (it might remain "South Sudan"), an anthem and a flag, many other issues come with independence.

* Exact border, especially around the oil-rich Abyei region.
* How to divide the revenue from oil.
* Deciding who qualifies as a citizen.
* Political reform beyond the one-party model.
* Economic development.

– Alex Thurston (CSM)

News

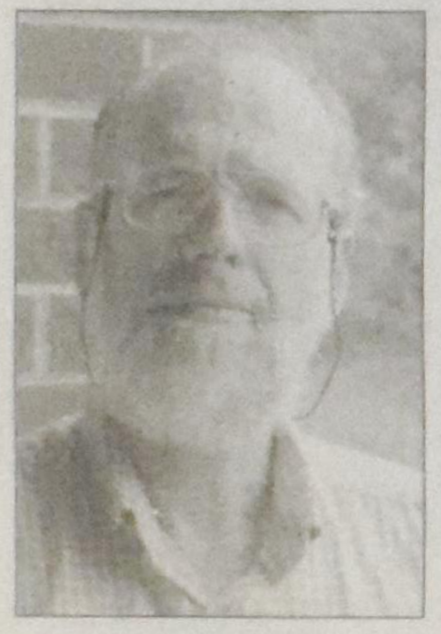
On adjusting theology to fit science: A conversation with Al Wolters

Roxanne VanFarowe

Al Wolters is a professor emeritus of Religion and Theology and Classical Studies at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ontario. He is the author of *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Eerdmans, 1985, 2nd edition with Michael Goheen, 2005). He is one of the few people in the world with access to the Dead Sea Scrolls, and has become an expert on the Copper Scroll. He served as chair of the study committee on creation and science, which reported to the Christian Reformed Church's 1991 Synod.

Christian Courier discussed with Wolters two articles published in September in the journal of the American Scientific Association written by John Schneider and Daniel Harlow, religion professors at Calvin College, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Calvin College is the official college of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

What is your opinion of the articles published by John Schneider and Daniel Harlow, religion professors at Calvin College? Is what they are doing – attempting to fit together science and religion – important and necessary?



An important part of a theologian's job is to deal with the results of science when they seem to contradict biblical or confessional teachings. Sometimes that is hard to do. And I believe that sometimes there are non-negotiables, beliefs which ought not to be compromised.

At a place like Calvin College, there should be a limit as to what the faculty can explore to make confessional beliefs fit with a consensus in the scientific community. Sometimes it is preferable to say, "We just don't know how that fits," rather than adjust what we believe to fit what science says.

Can you explain more about how the approach you prefer differs from how you see the Calvin professors' approach, in your opinion?

There are several ways to deal with the questions that arise when faith and science seem to conflict.

The first way is to deny what the scientists are saying, and adjust science to fit with one's confessional beliefs.

The second way is to agree with the scientists, and adjust one's theology to fit the science. I believe that is what these Calvin professors are doing.

The third, more traditional, way is to admit that in our current state of knowledge we do not know how this fits, but we are not going to deny the key points of our confessional declarations.

I chaired the Christian Reformed Church synodical study committee on creation and science that reported to Synod 1991. The issue of the historical fall, and the historicity of Adam and Eve were discussed at great length in the process of our study committee's work.

The confession of the historical fall is a cornerstone of Christian belief. To openly suggest, as a way of squaring our beliefs with scientific evidence, that Adam and Eve were literary devices and the fall never happened is a pretty momentous step to take – and not what professors at Calvin should be doing.

It becomes difficult, however, if the college gave advance approval to these professors' research projects. I appreciate that this is a very difficult issue for Calvin College to deal with, a fundamental issue.

Schneider appeals to Irenaeus of Lyon to find a traditional theology that could fit with evolutionary human forbears. What do you think of that argument?

I don't think his appeal to Irenaeus is valid. Irenaeus did not deny the historical reality of Adam and Eve and the fall.

How do you think Calvin College should proceed as it wrestles with the issues that have surfaced because of Harlow's and Schneider's papers?

I would need the wisdom of Solomon to answer that. It's a lose-lose situation. No matter what the [Calvin College] Board of Trustees does on this, it's going to be a disaster for the institution. There is no way of finding a solution that avoids considerable damage to the college.

If the college allows these professors to continue their work because of academic freedom, it's a disaster for those in the Reformed community who believe their views are unbiblical.

If the administration were to fire these professors, there would be a tremendous hue and cry within the college, the denomination and the larger community.

Schneider makes a comment that whole curricula of colleges are built on the creation-fall-redemption scheme. *["Entire Protestant college curricula are built uncritically upon these questionable Augustinian foundations" – page 7 of Schneider's article.]* He is challenging the foundation of the Reformed identity of Calvin and its sister institutions. I would go farther and say that what he and Harlow propose constitutes a challenge to Christianity 101, the basic framework of belief shared by historic Christian orthodoxy since the time of the church fathers.

Principalities & Powers

David Koyzis

Put no trust in mighty princes

The ancient Israelites were surrounded on virtually all sides by potential and real enemies, ranging from Egypt in the far southeast to the Arameans immediately to the north. Some of these rivals were more technologically sophisticated than the Israelites were. A chronic threat, the Philistines possessed Iron Age technology while the Israelites lagged behind with more primitive Bronze Age equipment. The fact that Israel was God's covenant people did not change this disparity in the local balance of powers. On the battlefield Philistia was simply superior and liable to win, unless someone or something, such as a bright youth with a well-aimed slingshot, intervened to redress this imbalance.

Israel reached the zenith of political power in the 10th century before Christ under the Judahite kings David and Solomon, who effectively subdued the Arameans, the Moabites, the Edomites and other nearby peoples, bringing them under Jerusalem's rule. Thereafter, however, the kingdom was divided and went into terminal decline, eventually to be swallowed up by the Mesopotamian superpowers of the day.

In such a precarious context it is unsurprising that the Israelites would look to their neighbours with some envy at their superior military prowess, aspiring to develop their own capacity to mount a more effective defence. They expressed this hope to the prophet Samuel, of whom they demanded "a king to govern us like all the nations" (1 Samuel 8:5). A king would give them a leader who would mobilize the nation's resources against its enemies.

However, Samuel warned them of what a king would do: enslave them and take the best of their resources for his own purposes. Yet because the people persisted in their demand, God enjoined Samuel to follow his people's wishes and anoint a king. The rest, as they say, is history.

One should not, of course, interpret this episode as a general indictment of political authority, which is strongly affirmed elsewhere in scripture (for example, Romans 13; 1 Peter 2:17). Even the kingly office, though prone to abuse, managed to fulfil a legitimate political function: "By justice a king gives stability to the land" (Proverbs 29:4).

Psalm 146 is a psalm of praise that realistically assesses the limitations and flaws of earthly rulers: "Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no help. When his breath departs he returns to his earth; on that very day his plans perish" (3-4). The psalmist instead extols the happiness of those who trust in God, "who keeps faith for ever; who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry" (6-7). Last year I set this psalm to verse to be sung to the proper Genevan melody. Here are three stanzas, covering verses 3-8a:

Put no trust in mighty princes,
nor misplace your confidence
in the fleeting ways of mortals,
who provide no sure defence.
They return to earth at death;
their best plans are but a breath.

Those who in the God of Jacob
seek their help find happiness;
they whose hope is in the LORD God
find that he is quick to bless.
For the heaven and earth he made
and the sea's foundations laid.

He keeps faith with us for ever,
justice gives to the oppressed.
He feeds those who suffer hunger,
comforts all who are distressed,
setting captive people free,
opens eyes that cannot see.

David T. Koyzis teaches political science at Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ontario, and will be lecturing there on Singing the Psalms the evening of Tuesday, 5 April 2011. His psalm versifications can be found at **genevanpsalter.redeemer.ca.**

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Editorials

What WikiLeaks lacks

Angela Reitsma Bick

When the apostle Paul travels to Greece, the book of Acts describes "all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there" as spending "their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new" (17:21, *ESV*). Prizing the intellect above all else, the Athenians searched for knowledge until that became an end in itself. And the craving to "tell and hear" something new sounds familiar – it sounds like the appetite WikiLeaks is feeding with its desire to expose state secrets around the world.

I support the idea of WikiLeaks. On the surface, the file-sharing website sounds like a useful way of calling governments to task and ensuring diplomatic transparency. Imagine how valuable WikiLeaks could have been in 1938: *Hitler plans to invade Poland.* The trouble is that I'm not sure if WikiLeaks itself supports the idea of WikiLeaks. In theory it's laudable, but in execution something is lacking. I have a handful of unanswered questions about the integrity of WikiLeaks' method, its mission and even its name.

Wiki has become a prefix for any website that depends on users for content, like the original *wiki* of Wikipedia – an encyclopaedia written by the masses. WikiLeaks started five years ago as a bulletin board for whistleblowers. At first, anyone could anonymously upload secret political, diplomatic or historical documents onto its secure website. But that system didn't last long. Neither did the comment boards, where readers could respond to the confidential articles. Instead, Julian Assange, WikiLeaks' founder, set up an editorial board to decide which documents to publish. And although Assange says he doesn't go looking for material, he has done so indirectly by creating a "Most Wanted Leaks" list and encouraging hackers to complete it. The five person board (including Assange) running WikiLeaks claims to have an objective way of deciding what to publish, when to publish it and how. Realistically, however, no one is objective when choosing material – not *Christian Courier,* certainly not Assange. But while impartiality is impossible to prove, what remains clear is that the *wiki* no longer applies to this independently controlled website.

Opaque method

The second aspect of WikiLeaks that raises red flags is its method of operation. Assange calls his organization a news service. Last November, on "the day that changed the news," Assange picked five newspapers around the world to help publish 700,000 classified U.S. documents: *The New York Times, The Guardian, Der Spiegel, Le Monde* and *El Pais.* This was a clever move; the electronically-savvy Assange could have disseminated the files in countless other ways. But by publishing in conjunction with these well-established and trusted media brands, WikiLeaks got a stamp of authority. No other format would have lent the same credence, or given him the same shield to hide behind the ensuing accusations of threats to national security.

It's not easy to gauge whether the documents released by WikiLeaks to date are a threat to U.S. national security or not. It sounds like the five sets of editors did what they could to redact the names of people in danger. But I just came across an interesting story. In 2008, *New York Times* reporter David Rhode was kidnapped while working in Afghanistan. During his imprisonment, editors at the *NYT* made an unusual decision – no stories on Rhode. They were able to convince other news organizations to do the same. When Rhode escaped seven months later, he told his superiors that their actions had "undoubtedly helped keep him alive" (*Heat and Light,* 190). In other words, not everything that a newspaper learns should be published.

I don't agree with U.S. Vice President Joe Biden, who called Assange a "high-tech terrorist," but I won't unquestionably accept Assange's stated motives either. As Reporters Without Borders said in an open letter to WikiLeaks, "indiscriminately publishing 92,000 classified reports reflects a real problem of methodology and, therefore, of credibility. Journalistic work involves the selection of information." Much of the data put out by WikiLeaks suffers a deficiency of context and analysis. WikiLeaks might reveal information that sheds light in important places, but their method lacks discernment.

Mission invisible

In the past six months, a handful of spin-off sites have sprung up in the WikiLeaks style: OpenLeaks, TradeLeaks, IndoLeaks and RuLeaks. Sin abounds in our world – in governments as much as in our hearts. Transparency is a worthy goal, but WikiLeaks doesn't model the transparency it demands of governments. And certain situations, like the Middle East peace talks, need confidentiality more than exposure; al-Jazeera's publication of the Palestine Papers, for example, will not help the peace process.

It is human to be interested in news and in the stories behind the movement of nations and empires. In Athens, Paul respectfully draws his listeners' attention to the most important news of all: the birth of a child in Bethlehem. Even though it is not easy to put current events, news or leaks into historical perspective, as Christians we are called to join the ensuing discussion from our own peculiar angle – the God in whom we all "live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

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Religion on the table

Kathy Vandergrift

Faith and public life has been a prevalent theme in the sixty-five years of *Christian Courier* and its predecessor. After more than thirty years of personal engagement in Christian witness on public issues, my grey hair reflects more questions than wisdom. But my sense is that we are entering a new phase in this journey, and that it is a good time to reflect on the rules for the road ahead.

For much of this history, a major focus of Reformed witness was making the case for inclusion of faith-based views in the dominantly secular public square in Canada. Many times any mention of God was a conversation stopper. Now God and religion are on the table, with many voices all claiming to have the word of God for Canada's future. More energy is spent in subtle competition between Christian voices than in dialogue between them. And many different Christian voices are joined by voices from a variety of other faith groups.

On any given day in Canada, prayers are made for contradictory pleas, with passion on all sides. I'm not worried that God will be confused. But non-Christians are confused and sceptics have lots of fuel for their growing claim that religion is not a force for good.

Activism

The current fad in advocacy, to campaign for particular causes through the internet, adds to the superficial rhetoric rather than fostering in-depth reflection on root causes. Church leaders tell me they find it hard to sort through the many requests to promote specific campaigns sponsored by different faith-based groups. On top of the campaigns by faith-based advocacy groups, the major partisan political parties are aggressively playing for the votes of different religious communities through favours and language that sounds good to the ears of believers of different stripes.

Under the activist surface, there is a vacuum of thoughtful analysis and reflection about the implications of Christian beliefs (and other faiths) for the major challenges facing Canada. Slogans such as "get tough on crime," for example, substitute for genuine discussion on what makes communities safe. Reason should not be a god, but it is better than the irrational talk that dominates politics today.

As readers of *Christian Courier*, we watch the trends and likely support one or more of the faith-based voices. We also have a role to play in shaping the playing field on which current trends will work themselves out. May I suggest five steps towards thoughtful engagement in the public square:

- Publicly protest name-calling, labelling and polarization into "us and them" language. "Christian right" and "Christian left," for example, are easy handles – I have also used them for quick reference – but they are increasingly unhelpful as categories, harmful for public civility and used to dismiss rather than engage in dialogue about alternatives. Instead, we need more dialogue, especially between faiths, like what happened in Winnipeg this summer on the theme of global justice.
- Probe how links are made between Christian beliefs and a particular position. It is easy to assume my position is God's position. But the middle steps in any analysis are important for making thoughtful distinctions between the various positions that claim to be Christian these days.
- Reward depth analysis of issues over the rhetoric of emotive slogans. Few issues are black and white and genuine solutions are not simple. It's tough to find resources and support for in-depth work in the context of campaign fundraising.
- Put a high premium on truthfulness. I am appalled at the level of deliberate misrepresentation of other views that is justified by Christian passion for a cause. We would do well to return to the old school of debate in which a position is preferred if it is stronger than the best reading of the opposite view, rather than the "put-down" tactics of current public debate.
- Most importantly, stand up for a robust, respectful democracy in Canada. I fear for the health of what Canada could best contribute to the world: a model of a political/social culture with respect for all and pulling together to face the challenges of caring for the creation we all share.

Kathy Vandergrift (kathyvandergrift@rogers.com) is a public policy analyst with years of experience on various issues. She holds a Master's Degree in Public Ethics from St. Paul's University and teaches public ethics for university students.

News/Letters

Nicholas Schuurman appointed *CC* Review Editor

ST. CATHARINES, Ont. – The Board of Reformed Faith Witness, which publishes *Christian Courier*, announces the appointment of Nicholas Schuurman as Review editor of *CC*, effective February 1. Schuurman has written for several publications, including *Young Poets*, a division of The League of Canadian Poets, where he works as a staff reviewer. One of his critical reviews on Canadian poet Anne Michael's poem "Phantom Limbs," received honourable mention in ARC Poetry's *How Poems Work* contest earlier this year. He has also published a number of his own poems and essays. Schuurman is a graduate of Heritage College and Seminary in Cambridge, Ontario, where he studied Theology and Intercultural Studies. In our next issue Schuurman (reviews@christiancourier.ca) will be taking over *CC*'s Review page, which includes analysis of current books, movies and plays. Schuurman works as a part-time pastor with a Hmong community supported by the Mennonite church of Canada, in Kitchener. Having spent the first two decades of his life in Tillsonburg, Ontario, he now lives in Guelph.

Pill's side effects not just medical

Thanks for your provocative editorial "Out of control: the unchallenged authority of the 'pill'" (Dec. 13, 2010), which highlights important facts about the effects of the pill on a woman's health that I, for one, didn't know. You rightly point out the influence of consumerism in making the pill increasingly accessible to young women and also the bias inherent in a lack of pharmaceutical push for male contraceptive research and options.

Ross Douthat, columnist at *The New York Times*, recently ran a piece called *The Unborn Paradox* (Jan. 2, 2011) in which he discusses some further consequences of our uncritical reliance on the pill. He cites an essay called "Waking Up From the Pill" in which the author, Vanessa Grigoriadis, argues that complacent attitudes about chemical birth control have led women "to forget about the biological realities of being female . . . inadvertently, indirectly, infertility has become the Pill's primary side effect." I was intrigued enough to click on the link and read the essay. Personally, I find it ironic that Grigoriadis frames the issue of infertility once again as a women's issue. Nor does Douthat bring her to task for this or even comment on it. How comically *pro forma*. The new politically correct reproduction: "no boys allowed." Whether to inhibit conception or to ensure future fertility, the responsibility belongs to women. How can it be otherwise? If it's her body and her choice, then it's her problem.

Douthat does note that infertility itself has birthed a lucrative IVF (in vitro fertilization) industry. The burden of infertility used to be ameliorated to some extent by adoptions. Today, given the prevalence of single parenting, says Douthat, only one percent of babies born to unwed mothers are adopted. He also points out that one in five pregnancies are terminated at abortion clinics (American stats).

So in addition to the health and gender-related issues addressed in your editorial, there are plenty of other tangential factors about the hegemony of "the pill" that deserve consideration. As Christians we are uniquely positioned to offer an alternative outlook, one that is pro-life, that places the formation of families within biblical parameters, and that includes both men and women in the discussion.

Cathy Smith
Wyoming, ON

God controls the climate

In Bert Hielema's article "Falling on deaf ears: Christians and climate change" (Dec. 27, 2010), the author laments that Christians and pastors are not accepting or getting involved in climate change. May we say "thank God!"

The whole climate change issue is becoming an idol or cult. Like other cults, there are those who set the rules and those who must adhere or suffer severe consequences. They do not trust in the God who created the heavens and the earth, or that he can control the climate and the weather. That does not mean that we can be careless and irresponsible, but we do not control the weather or the climate. God does.

Was the flood recorded in Genesis 6-8 because the people did not take care of the climate, or was it because they were worshiping their idol gods and had forsaken the God who created the universe and was in control of it?

Harry Salomons
Edmonton, AB

'One nation, under God'

After reading Marian Van Til's column 'Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord' (Nov. 22, 2010), I was expecting some response from readers. Seeing none, I would like to raise some questions.

When Obama had just become president, we read that Van Til was not thrilled but gave him the benefit of the doubt. Has Obama so quickly become a great danger to her beloved nation? It seems that trying to get health care for everyone is his biggest mistake. How can a sincere Christian seem satisfied with so many poor people uninsured? How can she be so eager to get rid of Obama that it does not seem to matter how? Why does it seem like there is no concern that the gap between rich and poor becomes wider? Does the writer still believe in the American Dream?

The articles from Marian are always worthwhile for me to read; I feel one in faith with her. That is maybe the reason that I was so disappointed.

Hans Katerberg
Gowanstown, ON

CC kicks off Campaign 2011

Two years ago, *CC*'s former general manager Stan de Jong announced a successful completion of the 2009 *Christian Courier* campaign. Now, at the Board's request, de Jong is starting another campaign in 2011, this time to raise $10,000 to match a donation from an anonymous donor in the same amount. The money is needed to continue the development of a healthy journalistic witness in Canada under the leadership of Editor Angela Reitsma Bick and her gifted group of editors and writers.

Professor John Hiemstra of the King's University College wrote: "The renewal of *Christian Courier* certainly caught my attention over the past year. It is a work in progress, already richly deserving of broadened readership, our subscriptions, enlarged writer input, and most of all, our financial gifts."

Dr. Calvin and Ines Seerveld also encouraged financial support of *CC* when they wrote: "A new generation of talented leaders has come into place, with a gritty alertness to the problems pressing in upon all who want to follow Jesus Christ in their journalistic reflection."

Please consider helping *CC* strengthen its journalistic reflection. We encourage current readers to win new subscribers in order to build *CC*'s support base. Your many gifts will ensure the continuation of *Christian Courier* in 2011 and 2012. All donations are tax creditable.

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News

CRWRC denied Canadian government funding

BURLINGTON, Ont. (CRCNA) – Late in 2010 the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) received word that its funding from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) would not be renewed. This loss of nearly $1.1 million came as a shock to those within the organization.

"CRWRC has over 30 years of development experience, and for 20 of those years the excellence of our programs and our ability to provide matching funds have won us support from CIDA, based on CIDA's priorities," said CRWRC-Canada Director, Ida Kaastra-Mutoigo. "CRWRC was seen as a good way for CIDA to meet its objectives."

The December decision by CIDA, however, was not the result of a lack of confidence in CRWRC's programs. Instead, CRWRC – like many other Canadian charities – was caught in the murky space between old and new priorities and changes in proposal application procedures and expectations at CIDA. The result has been a major funding shortfall for anti-poverty and aid-effective programs.

CRWRC's most recent contribution agreement with CIDA (for $1.1 million per year for three years) ended in December 2010. In late 2009 and early 2010, CRWRC staff worked with their CIDA program officer to submit a proposal for a new contribution agreement that would span 2010-2015. This proposal was submitted in March 2010, well in advance of the current agreement expiring.

In October CRWRC received feedback that its proposal fit within CIDA priorities, but needed some revisions. CRWRC staff made these revisions and submitted the revised proposal in November.

Rule change leaves $1 million gap

At the time, CIDA was in the process of changing its application guidelines and procedures. A few weeks after CRWRC submitted its revised proposal, CIDA announced a new framework for processing and approving applications. In December, CRWRC received word that its application would not be retained for funding.

"CIDA continues to register a great deal of respect for CRWRC programs," said Mutoigo. "This is evidenced by CIDA issuing a special invitation to CRWRC to attend a meeting [in January] with an exclusive group of 10 of the highest funded charities for programs in Haiti. CIDA has also confirmed that CRWRC's priorities align with theirs. We've been invited to submit a new application under the new framework by the March 31 deadline."

While CRWRC remains hopeful that this new application will be funded, the new contribution agreement would not take effect until September 2011. That leaves CRWRC with a nearly $1 million gap in funding this year. CRWRC is encouraging its supporters to help fill this gap by contributing to its "Harvest Hope" campaign.

Families in Malawi have improved their food production.

"CIDA contributions over the last few decades have helped CRWRC prepare fertile ground for amazing growth in communities around the world. It has supported our expansion into new villages, our training of local leaders, and the introduction of life-changing programs to improve agriculture, literacy, health and family income," explained Mutoigo. "This has put families on a road to freeing themselves from poverty. Unless this gap in funding is met, CRWRC will have to cut some of its programs, and communities will be thwarted in their progress to a better future. We are hoping that people will step up and make a special donation so that communities can continue reaping the benefits of the programs that have been started" (see **crwrc.org/harvesthope**).

King David headed for the big screen – twice

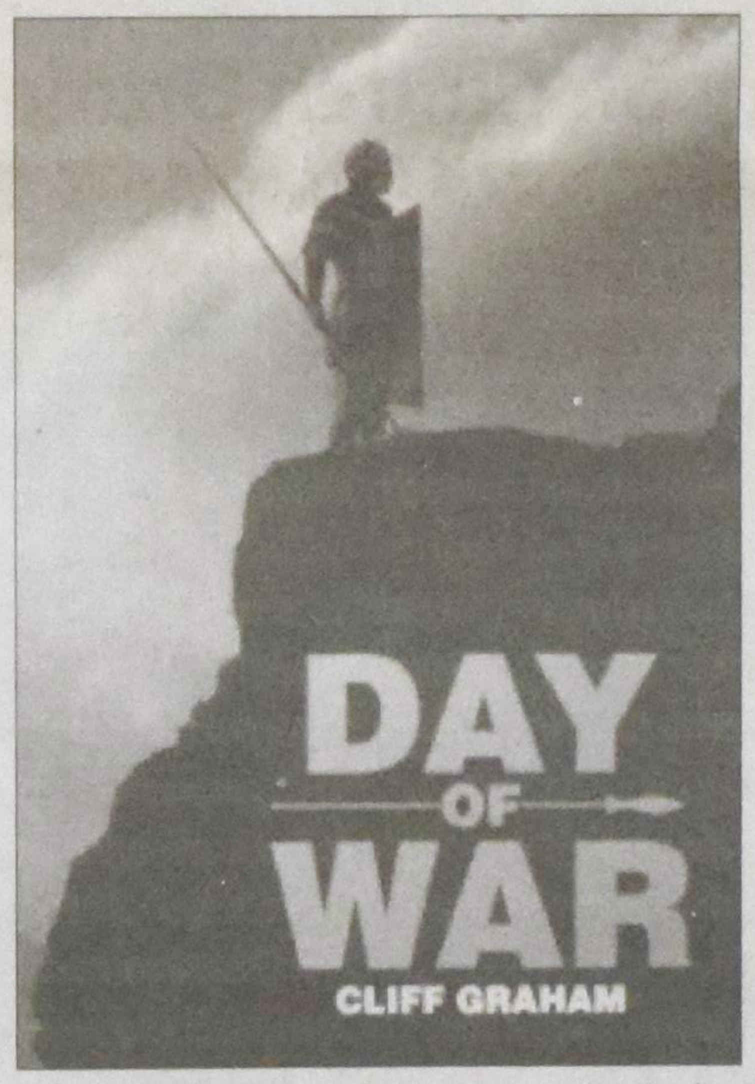
Marian Van Til

WHEATON, IL – *Christianity Today's* entertainment blog is reporting that film watchers can expect to see not one but two movies about King David in the relatively near future. Both films are being directed by Christians.

Directors Scott Derrickson and David Cunningham are in the early stages of creating major films based on the biblical King David, writes CTentertainment blog editor Mark Moring. Derrickson's film will focus on David's encounter with Goliath. In fact, the film is to be called *Goliath*. Derrickson previously directed *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* and *The Day the Earth Stood Still*.

The Hollywood Reporter says that the film (despite its Bible-based story) will have "a modern vibe that harkens to the spirit of films such as *300* and *The Bourne Identity*." It is being produced by Temple Hill, which also was behind *The Nativity Story* which came out in 2006.

The film by other the Christian director, David Cunningham, is to be called *Day of War*. It will be the first in a series of 3D films based on the *Lion of War* franchise, which tells an extended story of King David and his "mighty men." Cunningham's previous films are *The Seeker: The Dark Is Rising, To End All Wars* and *The Path to 9/11*.



The book, Day of War, *on which the film by the same name will be based.*

Grant Curtis, who produced the three Spider-Man films, will produce the *Lion of War* movies. Moring reports that Cunningham's GiantKiller Pictures has optioned rights to all five *Lion of War* books, to be released by Zondervan starting with *Day of War* in April this year.

Cunningham told *Christianity Today* that *Day of War* will be a "major motion picture in the vein of *Lord of the Rings*." The GiantKiller Pictures website says the films "will be realized in 3D with the supernatural aspects of the film literally hovering in the audience."

Toronto artist 'offended by sin' as he sees it

TORONTO (Postmedia News) – A Toronto art gallery is planning an exhibit of provocative works that include a picture of a seated Pope Benedict XVI riddled with bullet holes and another of U.S. President Obama nailed to a cross.

Called "Persona Non Grata – The Veil of History," at *CC*'s press time for this issue the exhibit was due to open at the Bezpala Brown Gallery on February 5. It is to consist of 30 paintings and four sculptures by Peter Alexander Por intended to portray "the story of oppression, pain, suffering, persecution and death," according to a statement from the art gallery.

Publicity from the gallery further says that the image of the Pope is "a less than subtle expression of the hurt and anger directed at a pontiff and an institution that has abandoned its flock, choosing to focus on dogma while its subjects suffer and, in many instances, die from its archaic policies."

Obama is shown nailed to a cross because Por sees him as "a victim, crucified in the wake of special and distorted interests."

Por is a Toronto artist who was born in Hungary during the Second World War and raised a Catholic. "The existence of cruelty and murder offends him personally and he cannot forget it," art critic Judy Stoffman is quoted as saying in the gallery's release. "It is as though he lacks the protective skin that most people have developed to be able to function."

British B&B owners may not use faith to make business decisions

Marian Van Til, with files from **TCI**

NEWCASTLE, UK – In late January a British judge ruled that bed-and-breakfast owners Peter and Hazelmary Bull may not prohibit unmarried partners from sharing a bed at the Bull's bed-and-breakfast, even though allowing such cohabiting is morally reprehensible to the B&B owners and a violation of their daily attempts to live their Christian faith.

The Bull's policy, which they instituted when they opened in 1986, was protested by Martyn Hall and Steven Preddy as specifically discriminatory against homosexual couples, though the Bulls had for nearly 25 years been applying their prohibition equally to both heterosexuals and homosexuals.

Judge Andrew Rutherford ruled that under Britain's Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations, civil partnerships must be treated in the same way as marriage. However, the judge did give the Bulls permission to appeal because he recognized that his decision "does affect the human rights of the defendants to manifest their religion and forces them to act in a manner contrary to their deeply and genuinely held beliefs."

The Bulls' legal defense was funded by The Christian Institute. Spokesperson Mike Judge said, "This ruling is further evidence that equality laws are being used as a sword rather than a shield. Peter and Hazelmary were sued with the full backing of the government-funded Equality Commission. Christians are being sidelined. The judge recognizes that his decision has a profound impact on the religious liberty of Peter and Hazelmary."

Hazelmary Bull responded, "We are obviously disappointed with the result. Our double-bed policy was based on our sincere beliefs about marriage, not hostility to anybody. We are trying to live and work in accordance with our Christian faith. As a result we have been sued and ordered to pay £3,600. But many Christians have given us gifts, so thanks to them we will be able to pay the damages."

The Bulls are considering whether to appeal the decision.

News

B.C.: Friendship Group is keen on helping CRWRC

Marian Van Til, with files from **Tina Veenstra**

SMITHERS/TELKWA, B.C. – Maria Pacheco and Shirley Reitsma have been friends for many years. For the last 10 of those years their friendship has deepened as they both have attended Friendship Group meetings. Maria has a mental handicap and Shirley is her mentor. The meetings are monthly gatherings that are an important part of the Christian Reformed Church's ministry to mentally disabled people.

At its Christmas-time meeting in 2009, the Smither/Telkwa group passed a collection bucket to collect money to pay for a gift from the annual Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) Christmas catalogue. The catalogue allows donors to give money for specific items CRWRC needs for its overseas ministries.

Friendship Group members were able to provide mosquito nets, fish, goats, water filters and a calf to help families in Africa, Honduras, Bangladesh and Cambodia. The joy of providing all those items to people who desperately need them inspired Maria Pacheco to decide that she would like to help CRWRC all year long.

So Pacheco set in motion a plan for 2010. She would start saving. And every time she used the treadmill at Shirley Reitsma's home – which she did regularly – she would donate one dollar. As a result, throughout 2010 Maria collected $266. She happily gave the money she saved to CRWRC for families who need help to feed their children, and also for providing Bibles to children who do not have one. In addition, the entire Friendship Group once again held a collection again this past Christmas and collected $320 for CRWRC's 2010 "Give Hope" gift catalogue.

Maria Pacheco (l.) and Shirley Reitsma with Shirley's treadmill. The treadmill played a role in Maria's raising money for CRWRC.

More than 40 Friends and mentors belong to Smithers/Telkwa Friendship Group. Together they enjoy a variety of activities at their meetings: singing, reading, learning from the Bible, playing games, sharing personal stories and events, asking for prayer, a snack time and doing crafts. They also meet for special events all year long: a Christmas evening, picnics in the park, wiener roasts, games in the gym, and bowling. The mentors attest to the fact that everyone eagerly looks forward to each meeting and regularly attends.

Besides the local Christian Reformed congregations, there are churches from six other denominations represented in the group, and also members who do not go to a church. One mentor sums up their mission and activity: "Together we share the love of Jesus with each other."

CRC publishes first commentary on Church Order in 40 years

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (CRCNA) – Faith Alive Christian Resources, the independent publishing arm of the Christian Reformed Church, has published the first full-fledged commentary in 40 years on the denomination's Church Order. Written by church order expert and long-time seminary professor Dr. Henry De Moor, the commentary is being called "thoughtful, informative and in-depth."

De Moor's commentary provides explanation, analysis and insight into the 86 articles that make up the Church Order. The Church Order gives guidance and sets rules on how both the denomination and individual congregations should conduct their business.

De Moor, who recently retired from teaching church polity at Calvin Seminary, explains why he wrote the commentary. It "is important to know the 'why' behind the rules," he says. "If that's not clear to us, we are not truly privy to the wisdom of the tradition." He says further, "The book features a treatment of each article of our Church Order – half of it exposition, being theological, historical, or practical in nature, the other half of it real life questions and answers that I have received and written over many years of work at Calvin Theological Seminary."

De Moor has served as an advisor to the CRC synod for many years, clarifying rules and offering recommendations when issues involving the Church Order have arisen. He has also served the same function for other church assemblies.

Important for the biblical witness of the church

The commentary is divided into four sections, plus a conclusion. In the first section, "The Offices of the Church," Article 2 states, "The church recognizes the offices of the minister of the Word, elder, deacon, and ministry associate. These offices differ from each other only in mandate and task, not in dignity and honor." De Moor explains that these offices "are instruments of Christ's ministry and organs of his rule. They constitute his Lordship and saving presence among his people, as well as his continuing witness to the world." He goes on to discuss the role of the offices in general and the significance of each office. In addition, he includes a 1965 synodical statement on officebearers.

The second section deals with "The Assemblies of the Church." There, De Moor discusses a range of subjects, including the role and function of a classis (roughly equivalent to a presbytery or diocese in some other denominations). De Moor touches on who can be a member of classis and on the appointment of classical counselors "who oversee the process of calling a minister of the Word to congregations in its midst."

In Section 3 De Moor analyzes the Church Order's approach to "The Tasks and Activities of the Church." For instance, following Article 54, he reflects on the centrality of preaching in worship. "As indicated in the article, the sermon is central to worship in the Reformed tradition. Not the sacraments, not the prayers, not the hymns, and not the praise – all good and necessary things – but proclamation is at the center of what we do each and every Sunday."

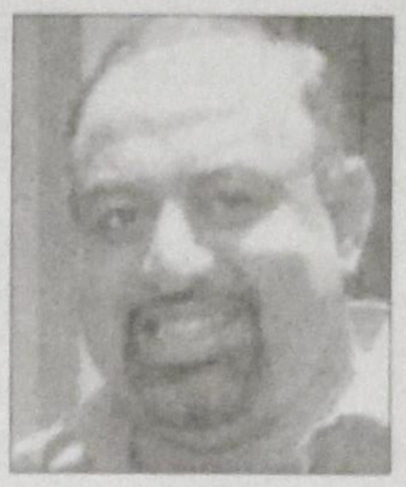
In the fourth section, "The Admonition and Discipline of the Church," DeMoor explains that the overall purpose for articles relating to admonition and discipline are the need to deal "with the 'what' of the institutional church when worship, faith nurture and pastoral care do not have their desired effects."

The final article of the Church Order (Article 86) states, "This Church Order, having been adopted by common consent, shall be faithfully observed, and any revision thereof shall only be made by synod." Here, De Moor draws conclusions about the significance of the Church Order. "It unites us to one another, a gift of grace prayed for.... A biblically based order does not place roadblocks on our way through history. It thoroughly enhances the mission our Lord has given us," he writes.

In the Church Order forum on The Network, the CRC's online program linking people on issues of ministry, De Moor invites comments on his commentary (**network.crcna.org**).

Christian persecution expert: Iran increases targeting converts from Islam

MARKHAM, Ont. (WEF) – "The ongoing raiding of homes and arrests of Christians in predominantly Shi'ite Iran, which began deplorably during the Christmas season, need to stop immediately," says the executive director of the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF).



Godfrey Yogarajah wants to call attention to the fact that since the day after Christmas Iranian security agents in plain clothes have searched the homes of many Christians and arrested at least 40 of them in a crackdown in the capital city of Tehran as well as several other places in Iran.

In a release from the WEF Yogarajah explained that "the onslaught, targeting converts from Islam and those engaged in evangelism," continued despite international concerns having been voiced previously over the arrest of a pastor, Behrouz Sadegh-Khanjani, and over the conviction of another pastor, Yousef Nadarkhani, of the Full Gospel Church in Rasht. The two were accused of apostasy, which carries the death penalty, according to strict Muslims.

Evangelical 'parasites'?

Tehran's governor, Morteza Tamadon, was quoted by state news agency IRNA as saying that missionary evangelicals had stepped up their activity in Iran, which according to him is a "cultural invasion of the enemy." The governor went on to say, "Just like the Taliban, who have inserted themselves into Islam like a parasite, [evangelicals] have crafted a movement in the name of Christianity."

Yogarajah countered, "The growing authoritarianism in Iran only shows that the regime's popularity is falling drastically, which is making the government highly insecure and unnerved." He added, "It is highly condemnable and incongruous that while Shi'ites themselves face persecution in Sunni-majority countries like Pakistan where they are minorities, in Iran some of their leaders emulate the same intolerant Sunni extremists by persecuting the Christian and other minorities. Regular campaigns against minorities by the Iranian regime cost the people of Iran dearly, as they divert the country's limited resources that could be used for citizens' welfare to fund activities that only create tensions and isolate the country even further."

In Iran, Christians account for only about one percent of the Muslim-majority population. The Iranian regime also persecutes other minorities, including Zoroastrians, Baha'is and Sufis.

The WEA's Religious Liberty Commission urges international policy analysts and those concerned with human rights and religious persecution to treat and highlight the escalating persecution of minorities in Iran as an extremely serious issue.

The Religious Liberty Commission is monitoring the situation in more than 100 nations. It defends persecuted Christians, keeps the global church informed, challenges the church to pray (see **idop.org**) and gives all possible assistance to those who are suffering. The commission also makes fact-finding trips and meets with governments and ambassadors, speaking up for suffering brothers and sisters. At the United Nations the Commission reports about the situation and arranges special hearings with Christians from countries under pressure.

Columns

Technically Speaking

Derek Schuurman

Remembering Theo Plantinga

On a cold evening in late January, a group of people gathered in a warm classroom at Redeemer University College to celebrate the life and work of Theodore Plantinga, a professor who passed away in 2008. The evening included a book launch, a *Festschrift* of writings in Theo's honour. The project was launched by one of his former students. Members of his family, students, colleagues, friends and pastors were all in attendance. Redeemer was a fitting place for the event to be held, to remember one of its founding faculty members and author of *Rationale for a Christian College*, a 1980 manifesto on the establishment of a Christian college in Ontario.

I began working full-time at Redeemer in 2003 and got to know Theo as a colleague. It became clear that we shared a common interest in computers, and so began a mutually beneficial relationship where he taught me some philosophy and I answered his questions on computers. In fact, Theo was among the first at Redeemer to adopt computer technology, and the first prof to put his lectures online. Some of his writings can still be found at **plantinga.ca**, which includes his writings on Reformational history (readers interested in technology may wish to read Theo's article entitled "Technology and Verzuiling" at **plantinga.ca/m/MDL.HTM**). His writings also included books, translations, and articles for a range of Reformed publications like *Christian Courier*, *Christian Renewal* and *The Outlook*.

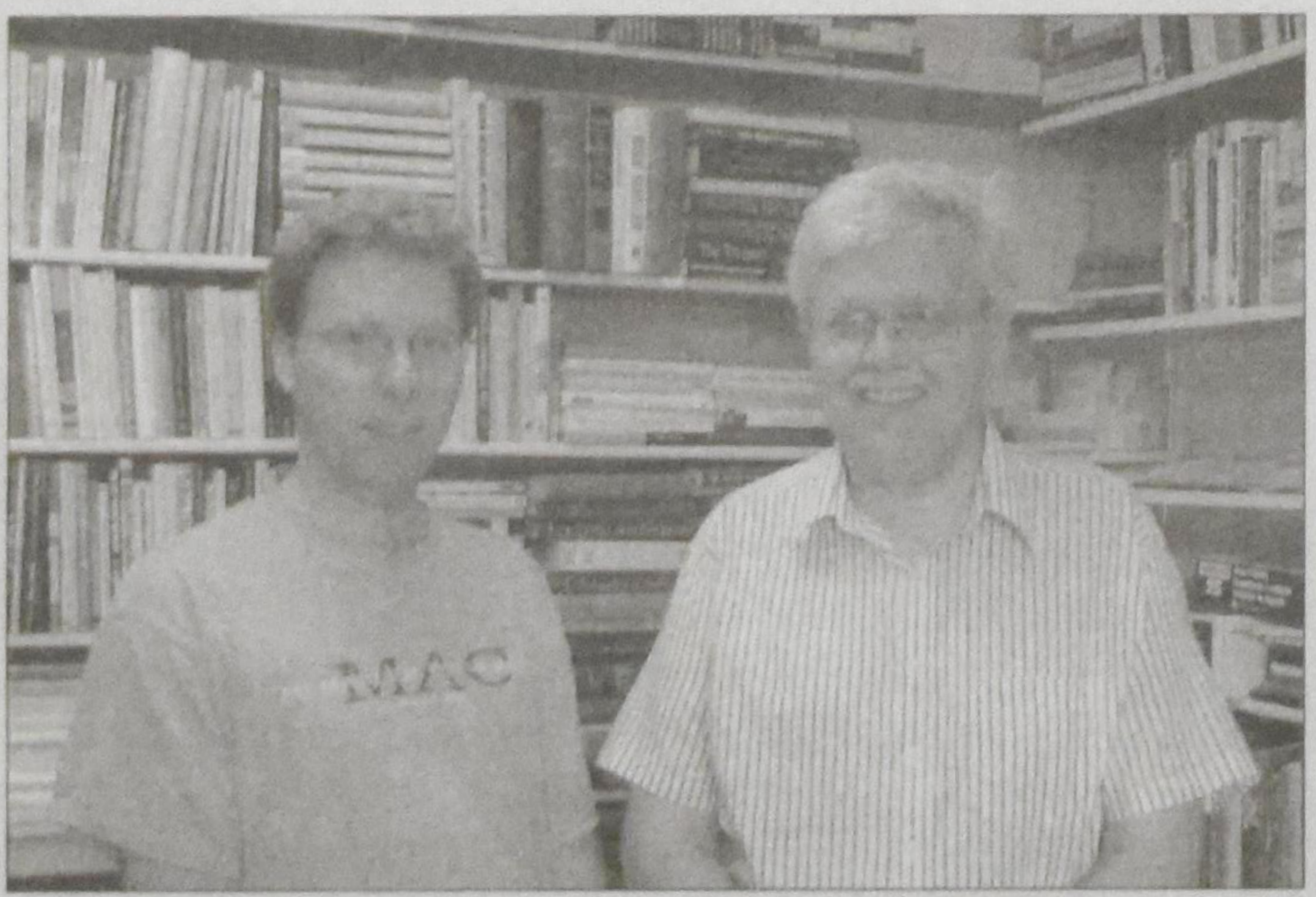
As I got to know Theo, I observed that he could sometimes be a "provocateur"; he would ask challenging questions that sometimes took you aback. He was also infamous for his loud ties, which I think were selected to evoke a similar response. Since his passing, Redeemer instituted a "Theo Tie Day" in which people playfully compete to wear the most outlandish tie. As a vegetarian he often teased me about not eating enough vegetables (something I still struggle with). I think he enjoyed throwing intellectual curve balls, and he could do it well because he was very well read and articulate. Not everyone appreciated his style, but I usually saw the twinkle in his eye. Ideas were his playground.

The unique 'yours truly'

I found Theo very encouraging and gracious. He always said hello in the halls and we would often chat together. I think he was an example of the best of inter-disciplinary interaction in a liberal arts and science college. He willingly came when invited to speak in my computer issues class and I returned the favour. Theo and I also collaborated on a few faculty colloquia, one of which was playfully titled "Free Software and the Free University: What Would Kuyper Say?" He often encouraged me to write and think more about the philosophy of technology and he generously read some of my initial attempts to write on this topic (while I was still "in my literary underwear," as he put it). He would give me books, send me occasional links to interesting articles, or suggest that I read something because "someone in your field should be familiar with this topic or with the writings of so-and-so." Although I didn't always agree with him on everything, Theo grew to be a mentor and a friend.

In time, Theo openly shared with me things about his life – and later about his struggles and declining health as he battled cancer. A few weeks before he died, I asked Theo whether the reality of facing one's mortality changes your academic view of things. He said yes; for example, he recalled how he used to lecture about how our society is afraid of pain and how it anesthetizes itself too much. His own experience of managing the pain brought on by cancer gave him a different perspective on this, and he confessed he would teach that topic differently now.

It's not quite the same at Redeemer without "yours truly" – a phrase Theo often used to refer to himself. I am thankful for the opportunity I had to know Theo, with all his idiosyncrasies and shortcomings. I learned many things from him, and many of us have benefited from the pioneering role he played in helping establish Redeemer University College.



Schuurman visiting Plantinga's book-filled office at Redeemer.

Editor's note: The next issue of Christian Courier *will include more about January's Festschrift for Theo Plantinga, as well as a review of the book of essays in his honour.*

Dr. Derek Schuurman (dschuur@csredeemer.ca) teaches computer science at Redeemer University College and was a colleague of the late Theodore Plantinga.

Christ @ Culture

Lloyd Rang

Decoder Ring not included

"One should aim not at being possible to understand, but at being impossible to misunderstand." Quintilian

When I was a kid, the back page of comic books held untold wonders, available for just a few dollars plus shipping and handling. You could order Sea Monkeys, joy buzzers, exploding cigars, onion gum, X-ray vision glasses and – coolest of all – a secret decoder ring. With the ring, you and your friends could pass secret messages back and forth that no one else could understand.

Unless they had a decoder ring.

Sometimes I wonder if our churches shouldn't hand them out to guests. Because it seems to me we often speak in a language no one else understands. I first noticed this many years ago, during university. One Sunday, I decided to take a friend to church with me. She hadn't been to church much, so it was a big deal for her to attend the service. And she was a little nervous. One of the first things she heard was an elder invite guests to "come downstairs to the fellowship hall for coffee and fellowshipping after the service."

She leaned over to me and said: "That's the first time I've ever heard 'fellowship' used as a verb. What does that mean, exactly?"

I told her the truth: "In my church, it means people come up to you, ask your last name and try to figure out which other Dutch person you're related to. It's kind of like how dogs greet each other, except with coffee and cake." Mind you, she was Ukrainian – which meant the conversations after the service ended rather abruptly.

Exclusive jargon

That's just one small example of language that requires a decoder ring. And that's not even a particularly bad one.

Consider the following sentence:

"Brothers and sisters in the Lord, as we look to God in prayer, let us join our hearts to pray that the Holy Spirit may move among us, that we may bear fruit, and grant us the assurance that we are covered by the blood of Jesus."

Now, an experienced churchgoer would recognize that sentence for what it is: a bunch of pious nonsense uttered by someone who doesn't want to say the wrong thing in front of a congregation full of peers. We might smile, knowingly, realizing the many times we've done exactly the same thing. And it would sail in one ear and out the other without hitting anything solid in between.

Now read it again. This time imagine that you are in church for the first time, and that someone has just prefaced a prayer that way. How would you respond?

Would you be confused? Probably.

Would you be repulsed? Maybe.

Would you feel excluded? Absolutely.

The irony is that this kind of "Christianspeak" is a language we Christians only ever use in a church setting. The rest of the week, we happily go about our business, speaking to people in plain English. If you were speaking to someone at work about your faith, you wouldn't begin using phrases like "led by the spirit" to describe your beliefs. If you did, you'd quickly lose them, and see it in their eyes.

Yet, when we get to church, we flip a switch and change the words we use and the metaphors we employ.

Pure and simple

Maybe this is a kind of spiritual shorthand. Maybe we feel we're being reverent – like we're putting on our Sunday-best words to go along with our Sunday-best clothes. Maybe it's because, to capture spiritual truth, we feel we need to speak in a different tongue. Whatever the reason for it, it's off-putting for newcomers.

Now, some might say that's perfectly fine. After all, when you visit a new country, you can expect people there to speak a different language. And, as a community of believers who have read and studied the Bible, there's bound to be a lot of things we talk about that others don't understand. It's up to them to read the Book and learn the language.

Fair enough.

But quite often, we use Christianspeak as shorthand. Rather than unpacking the meaning of a spiritual truth, we reach for something that sounds good, because it's easier. When we do that, we turn powerful and visceral phrases like "washed in his blood" and "the throne of grace" into meaningless platitudes.

Perhaps we can all work a little harder to speak more plainly in church. Not only for the sake of our new members, but for each other, too. Aren't we there because we want to sincerely know God and one another better? How can we do that when we use words whose true – and perhaps beautiful meaning – has worn away with overuse?

Or, as it says in 1 John 3:18, "Our love must not be a thing of words and fine talk. It must be a thing of action and sincerity."

For plain words like those, no decoder ring is required.

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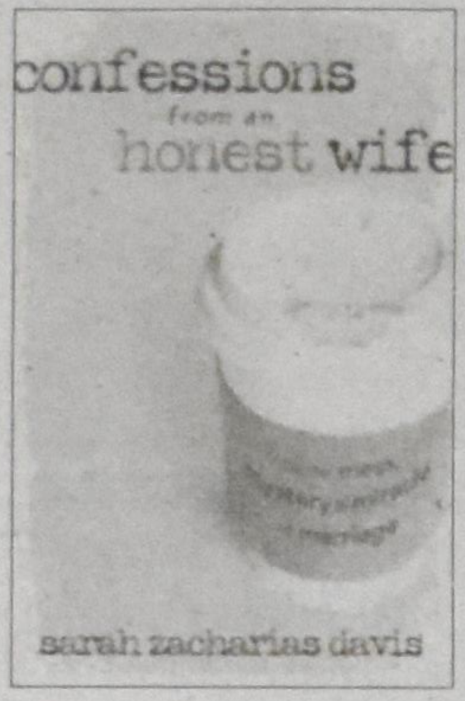
Reviews



The sweet is subtler: *Confessions from an honest wife*

Angela Reitsma Bick

Confessions from an honest wife on the mess, mystery and miracle of marriage by Sarah Zacharias Davis. (Revel Books, 2006).

"If I lived in a fairy tale it would go like this. There once was a girl who fell in love. She loved at first with abandon. She loved with grace and without judgement. She loved fully and completely, at least as much as a young girl can. Then one day the girl got married, and then another day sometime later she said, 'When have I given enough?'" (67).

After eight years of marriage, that's what Jen was wondering. "Is there a limit to giving in marriage? How much do you allow yourself to change to accommodate the other?"

Idiot's guide to love

The "relationship" section of our local bookstores is enormous. Go there with a problem, and you can find a title extending the promise of any solution you please, just like that friend who will always say what you want to hear. If you've already read Gary Chapman and Bill and Pam Farrel, it's hard to find relevant Christian advice on love, marriage and family life. *Confessions from an honest wife* is a notable exception. Sarah Zacharias Davis has compiled a useful reference of insightful stories about the everyday issues facing every wife.

We all do it, Davis begins; we project an image of perfection, hesitate to be honest about weaknesses, and judge others too quickly for their perceived failures. "Ours is a faith based on the gift of grace," she writes, "yet we fear grace will not be shown to us if we reveal our true selves. Perhaps this fear is, in part, because we've not shown grace to others" (13). Breaking the silence that covers our struggles is difficult, but Davis argues that this is the key to strengthening marriages in Christian community. Consequently, this book doesn't offer rules, advice or a three-step plan to perfect marriages. Instead, it's a collection of 21 stories, written by Davis with material from interviews. The stories are all true (although names have been withheld). As the cover suggests, it's a little bit like sitting down for coffee with 21 strangers – and hearing more about their lives than their own mothers know. You are bound to find yourself nodding in agreement at least once.

Beyond 'love the one you're with'

One woman, Amelia, tries to unpack the familiar command to make God the third person in every marriage. "How can a being not living and breathing in the flesh truly be a third person in marriage?" she wonders. After a hard year, Amelia realizes that her union often does include a third party: sometimes an ex-boyfriend, sometimes her mother-in-law. She worries that once they have children, the same intrusion will occur. It's not as hard as she originally thought to stretch a couple into three. The irony, of course, is that "the third person just isn't always God" (75). Eventually, she figures out that relinquishing control of her life to God scatters the unwelcome guests, and gives him a place in their union.

Many women in the book have confronted adversity. Some are surprised that, after "all twelve years of Christian school and then four years at a Christian college," they have very few resources for handling marital strife. Nonetheless, they've worked through issues of boundary, confidence and submission; faced illness and unfaithfulness and a "Grand Canyon of differences" with their spouses.

"In the same way you measure the growth of a child against a door frame," Rebecca says, "I see the marks of growth in our marriage so far" (64).

Sarah Zacharias Davis is the daughter of Christian apologist Ravi Zacharias; this, her first book, is accessible and biblically-grounded. She seems to delight in discovering that many of the best facets of marriage reflect our right relationship with God (intimacy, trust, faithfulness). The chapters tend to sound like the same person rather than 21 unique women, but that's one of the only criticisms I have of this book. Its usefulness outstrips any problems with prose.

There is no happily ever after for these women, or extended to the reader. As long as we live in a fallen world, there will be as much mess as miracle in marriage. But each story hints at how God can use even the messy and the mundane to his glory.

"I expect there will be more trials," Kate states. "There's something bittersweet about this. The bitter, of course, is obvious. The sweet is subtler" (43).

Children's books to mark Black History Month

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

The Hallelujah Flight by Phil Bildner. Illustrated by John Holyfield (G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2010).

During the Depression, African-American James Banning dreams of flying from coast to coast in his OXX6 Eagle Rock. With the help of Thomas Allan, who becomes his mechanic and co-pilot, Banning prepares the dilapidated plane for its daunting journey. Since times are tough, the twosome decides to pay for the journey by allowing people to sign the plane's wing tip in exchange for food, fuel or other supplies. On Sept 19, 1932, Banning and Allan – the flying Hoboes, as they come to be called – begin their voyage in Los Angeles. On their first stop, they put their plan to the test. Will people help them in exchange for the honour of signing the wing tip? They do! Encouraged by people's generosity, the flying Hoboes can continue.

As they travel, however, they also repeatedly encounter the ugliness of prejudice. They persevere. Twenty-one days and 3,300 miles later they complete their odyssey in New York. Based on a true story, *The Hallelujah Flight* introduces children to two brave African-Americans who overcome prejudice and other obstacles to pursue and realize a dream. Vivid illustrations capture both the joy and hardship of their exceptional endeavour.

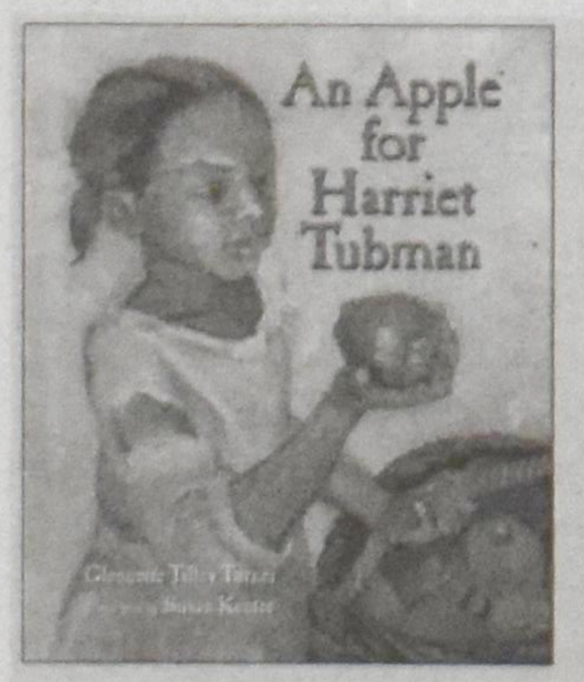
Night Running by Elisa Carbone. Illustrated by E. B. Lewis (Alfred A. Knopf, 2008).

In 1838 Virginia, young James prepares to flee from Master Graham's farm and to find freedom at last. His dog Zeus wants to follow him, but James will have none of it because Zeus will be noisy and endanger James's life. However, Zeus is more stubborn than James.

He runs boisterously through the woods, calling attention to James. When James is caught, Zeus – incredibly – frees him. From then on, Zeus guards James, attacks slave-catcher dogs and hunts for food.

When they reach the Ohio River – with the free state of Ohio on the other side – James commands Zeus to stay on the bank. Wishing he had learned how to swim, James climbs into a ramshackle canoe. In the middle of the river, the boat begins to sink. Zeus swims to his master's rescue, hauling him to shore. Discovered by a farmer – a Friend, or Quaker – James finally receives the help he needs to begin a life in freedom.

This moving tale of a dog's loyalty to his owner is based on the true story of Rev. James Smith's childhood escape to freedom. Muted, earth-tone illustrations portray the dangers and difficulties that James faced and overcame.



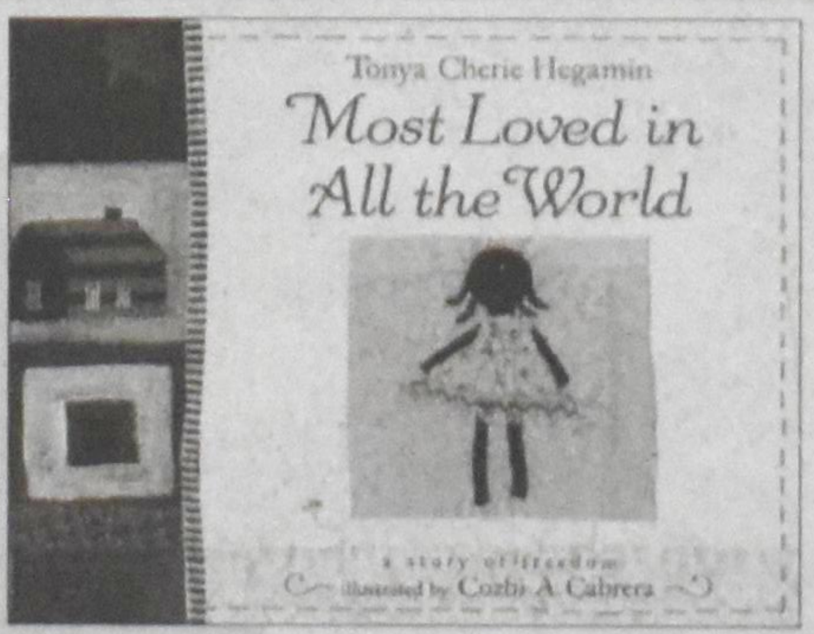
An Apple for Harriet Tubman by Glennette Tilley Turner. Illustrated by Susan Keeter (Albert Whitman & Company, 2006).

Harriet Tubman, the greatest "conductor" on the Underground Railroad, helped many slaves escape to freedom. Her feats are common knowledge. But few people know that she loved apples, a fact that the author learned while interviewing Tubman's great-niece, who had learned it from Harriet herself.

Born to slave parents around 1820, Harriet became the property of Edward Brodess. Along with her family and the other slaves, she worked hard in the field, house and apple orchard. Though she was forced to pick apples, she wasn't allowed to eat them. But once she did. When the overseer discovered her "crime," she was beaten.

Years later, when Harriet escaped slavery, she wasn't content to revel in her own freedom while others remained enslaved. Thus, she began her work on the Underground Railroad. In 1869, she bought a house in New York and planted a row of apple trees along the laneway. Each fall when the trees bore fruit, she invited the townspeople to share in her bounty. Once just a fruit she enjoyed, apples had become for her "a symbol of freedom for everyone to share."

Young readers will discover in Harriet Tubman a courageous, generous woman worth emulating.



Most Loved in All the World by Tonya Cherie Hegamin. Illustrated by Cozbi A. Cabrera (Houghton Mifflin Company, 2009).

A young slave girl observes her hardworking mama's suffering, as well as the quilt she works on each night even though her hands are raw and bleeding. The girl asks Mama questions about the quilt and wonders about the significance of the pictures on several squares – a log cabin, a star, a brown tree with green on one side, and a little girl. Mama explains the meaning of each to her. Nights later, Mama wakes her daughter and takes her, along with the quilt, to a meeting in the woods. There, Mama tells her to go with the other slaves to a place of freedom. In a heart-wrenching farewell, Mama makes an incredible sacrifice so her child can have a better life.

Author's notes explain a common fact of slavery: women who were secret agents for the Underground Railroad sent their children north to an unknown future, desperately hoping that one day their children would be free. Staying behind to help others escape, these women had no realistic hope of ever seeing their children again.

Features

Good lovin'
A meditation from the Psalms

I will say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go around in sorrow? Why am I beaten down by my enemies?"
My body suffers deadly pain as my enemies make fun of me. All day long they say to me, "Where is your God?"
My spirit, why are you so sad? Why are you so upset deep down inside me? Put your hope in God. Once again I will have reason to praise him. He is my Saviour and my God.

Psalm 42: 9-11

James Schaap

Half of all marriages fail. Why? Good question.

Some of the very best researchers on the subject, people who've listened to hours and hours of conversation between ordinary married people, have come up with very interesting assertions. Good lovin', they claim, may not be at the heart of long and happy marriages, even though it's what we'd like to believe. But what they've discovered is that a marriage drenched in passion isn't necessarily a marriage which will last.

Okay, what then? It seems that the success of a relationship may be more dependent on the ability to fight than the ability to love, some researchers say. Marriages fail, they claim, when spouses can't deal with the inevitable conflicts relationships create. Maybe I can put it this way – couples who learn how to fight, learn how to love.

It doesn't take a Ph.D. to know that conflict occurs even in the best of relationships. But those marriages that make it, a new study says, do so because spouses learn to keep those conflicts from escalating into something next to murder, the death of love and respect for one another.

I don't really know how our fights – my wife's and mine – rank with others. There have been some stiff ones, I know. Thankfully, I've not been around enough other couples' tiffs and rants to judge the relative nastiness of ours. But we've been married now for 35 years, and I seriously doubt we're in any kind of trouble, thank the Lord. We must have learned to manage our brawls, I guess, but don't ask me to write the "how to."

The fact is, it's impossible for me to imagine myself alone now. In the give-and-take of marriage, I've pretty much lost the inherent (and not sinful) egoism that arises, quite naturally, from being single. I'm not perfect, and I still want what's mine – and then some. But I can't remember the last time I told myself, somewhat bitterly, that the only reason I'd done something less than savoury was because I was married, because, well, (growl) "for her." It's been a long time, thank the Lord.

All of which is not to say we're home free. I'm far too old to be shocked.

Psalm 42: a roller-coaster

Mostly, Psalm 42 is lament. Three times (vss. 5, 8, 11), David pinches himself in the dark night of the soul, reminds himself to think on God's goodness; but he does that only because he's trying like mad to engineer an escape from the despair that surrounds him. Twice, in fact, he falls back into the darkness after trying the best he can to pull himself out.

I don't want to be prescriptive because God's love comes to each of us in so many shades and sizes that one size never fits all; but Psalm 42 makes me wonder – when I ride its roller-coaster emotions – whether some sweet believers need to understand that some others of God's people, as if they were in a marriage, need to learn to fight in order to learn how to love.

No one ever talks about that in Sunday School, but it seems to me that the proof is here in this rugged testimony, a song so laden with darkness. And there are other psalms like this one, lots of them, more than good Christian people are often willing to advertise.

But they're there. Maybe David – or whoever wrote this psalm – has learned how to love the Lord in all his mystery, only because he's also learned how to fight.

With permission from James Schaap's blog, Stuff in the Basement. *A well-known writer and Dordt college professor, Schaap's latest book is* Sixty at Sixty: A Boomer Looks at the Psalms *(Faith Alive, 2008).*

Better in the good old days? The Arranged Marriage *by V.V. Pukirev.*

A pastor opens up about divorce

Divorce is a tragedy. It is not what God wills for marriage or for families. That is a given.

I am divorced. I have been for over 11 years now. Rarely does a day go by that I am not reminded that my God-blessed union with another was dissolved and that it was at my instigation. To this day I have trouble saying the word "divorced" out loud. My adult children bear the emotional scars of our family life from before, during and after the divorce and it continues to play out in their lives. The guilt of that reality pierces my heart on a regular basis. Going through the divorce process was worst thing I have ever endured.

However, I also believe that divorce was the right thing to do. Sometimes the only choices left are bad ones and you have to try to determine the least of the worst. I won't go into the gory details; suffice it to say that protecting my children's physical, emotional and spiritual health was the prime motivation. I believe that my greater sin was that I waited too long to end the marriage and they paid the price of my selfish inaction. The fact that "no-fault" divorce laws were in existence meant sparing our family from even more trauma.

Articles and discussions about divorce contain a two-edged sword. They point to a truth: God hates divorce. So do I; so do most who have been through it. But the discussions often have an undercurrent of criticism to those who have been divorced, especially to divorced Christians.

For instance, here's a sampling of the types of comments I've heard: "Divorces are too easy to obtain and have become acceptable even among Christians." "People who are unhappy in their marriages just stop trying and walk away. They adopt the individualistic and selfish spirit of our society." Or, "People used to work at their marriage and endure the bad times. Marriage in the church should be a life-time commitment. That gives a marriage time to improve. Now people want an instant fix."

This is the not-so-nuanced message, intended or not, that I hear: "As a divorced Christian, you have let God down. You must not have taken your marriage seriously. You have contributed to the downfall of society and the ruination of the church. If only you had tried harder, you could have made it work."

Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn

I'm not saying don't talk about it. We need to talk about it; we need to understand it for the painful, awful deep dark thing that it is. We do need to be careful about making generalizations and assumptions regarding motivations – on both sides of the conversation. We need to remember that people are sinful, messy and complicated. We need to recognize that true evil exists in this broken world and easy answers are in short supply. We need to be careful of shooting our wounded. We need to seek and give godly grace.

We should rejoice with those who rejoice in their marriages that have endured and who have been blessed with a trusting, committed lifelong partnership as designed by God. We should mourn with those who have experienced the pain and remorse of relational failure on both sides of the marriage bond. We should look forward to the day when we will stand before the throne of God and all these things will be set aside as "perishable."

Name withheld by request.

Pastoral care for those 'living together'

Neil de Koning

Many times in ministry, the topic of a couple "living together" is placed on the agenda. How do we provide pastoral care? While most agree that what is best is a deep commitment blessed by their families, celebrated in community, blessed by God and firmly established in law, having a couple do less raises questions. In simple terms, "How do we bring good news?"

Central claims within the church about marriage

1. Marriage requires lifelong commitment.
2. Marriage changes the relational dynamics of family and community. While involving personal choice, it is a public act.
3. Marriage is best lived when the partners are imitators of Christ who "gave himself up" to love us. Phil. 2 and Eph. 5 affirm that the attitude of Christ is critical to the well-being of a marriage.
4. Marriage is best lived under the blessing of God.
5. Marriage has obligations and rights that demand legal protection. Property rights and children's rights are included in these legal obligations.
6. Marriage, when well lived, is a gift to community and Kingdom.

From claims to people

Beyond these claims, I make an assumption. The couple who lives together does not share my understanding. This should be obvious, but needs to be stated. They do not share my understanding of marriage, of the authority of church leaders, or the effect of their decision on their spirituality. It is not simply that they have transgressed the law of God. I assume they are not convinced of the claims that the church makes about marriage and do not believe that the elders have any right to speak. I might be wrong, but I make the assumption as a way of being hospitable – creating space for conversation.

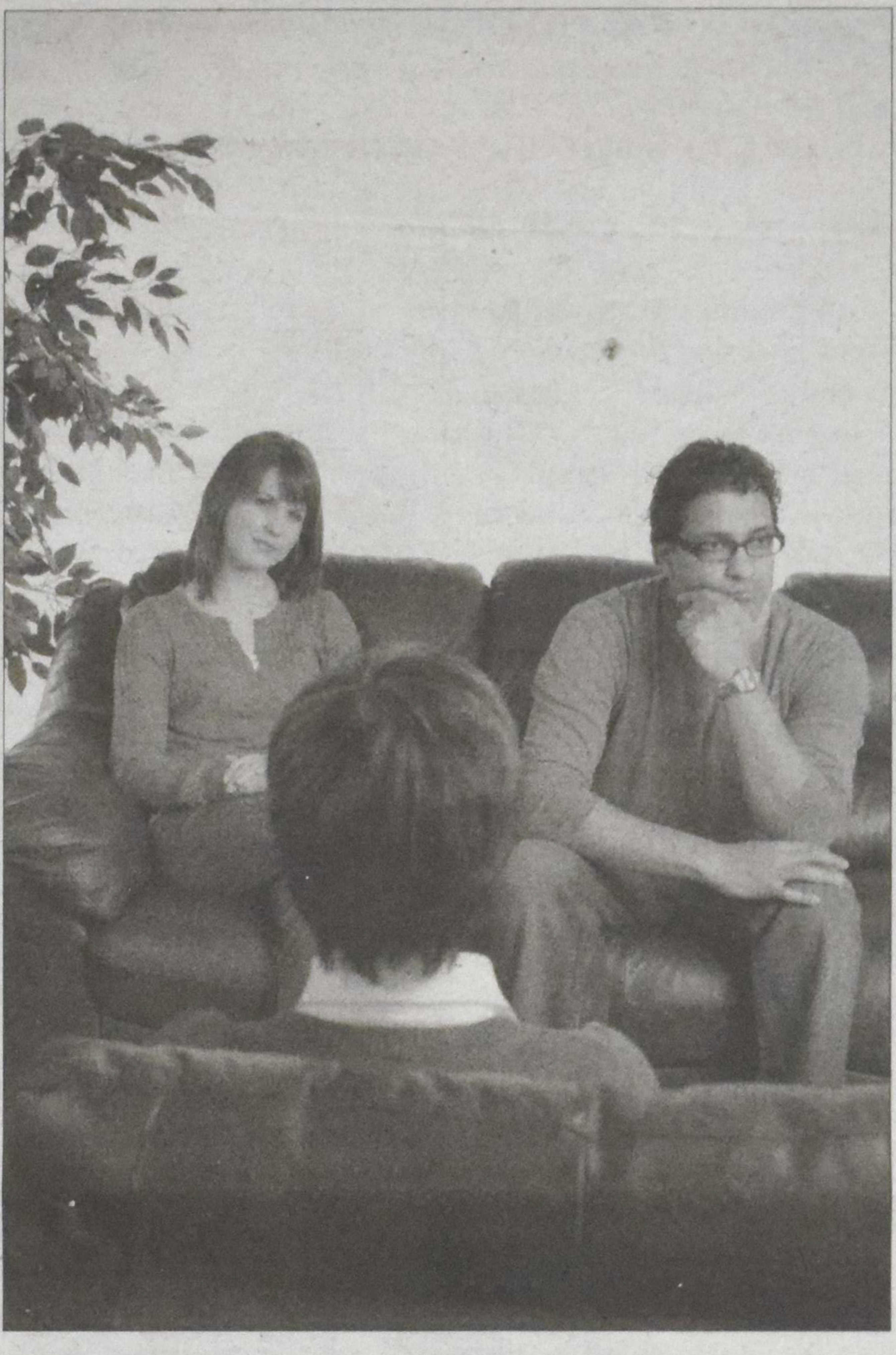
I also assume that they are risking their relationship with God. When we make decisions without considering the will of God, it reflects what is living in our heart. If Jesus is Lord, we listen to his voice. But if we make our desires "Lord", then we risk our relationship to God.

Making these assumptions has a consequence. My primary concern is for the spiritual well-being of the couple. I want them to return to a healthy relationship with Christ. I believe that as a couple develops their walk with God they will make better choices about their relationship. So this is where I begin.

Pastoral Care

So, how do we frame the conversation with a couple (at least one of whom is a baptized member of the church) who are living together but without the marriage certificate? They likely understood that the church would not approve of their new living arrangements. Simply telling them what they already know is not going to change their behaviour. A pastoral conversation is needed.

1. What commitment have you made to each other? Is this a trial or a permanent commitment?
2. How do you understand the difference between "living together" and "marriage"?
3. Have you received your families' blessing? How did that happen?
4. If this is so important to you, did you seek God's blessing?
5. How do you understand some of the legal ramifications of your decisions?



Each question helps me understand the nature of their relationship, the commitments they have made, and their desire to walk with God.

At this point I wonder to myself: Where is the sin? It could be ignorance of Scripture, of the claims we embrace about marriage, or the kind of preparation that builds a healthy marriage. Is it the failure to make a lifelong commitment? I have visited couples who have made a lifelong promise to each other. Or the couple could say, "You don't buy the car without taking a test drive." The latter is clearly not a commitment. Perhaps it's a failure to appreciate the context of their community. There are relational dynamics that go beyond the couple to family, friends and community. Public commitments make for healthy relationships. Is it a failure in their desire to walk through life with God? Are they practical atheists who simply do not understand that all their life is lived in the context of God's power, grace and rule?

My approach can differ depending on how I discern the way in which sin is configured in their life together. Making things right is not merely a matter of a marriage certificate. It involves key relationships lived in and through the grace of the Lord. The claims we make about marriage challenge many aspects of their life together.

My next step is figuring out the strategy for healing and growth. This involves a few critical matters for the couple and the pastor to ascertain: vision, intention and means. The couple needs to be asked: What is your vision for your life together? Some of this we know. But it needs to be articulated again. We want to hear them say that they desire a lifelong relationship in which they together serve the Lord. The pastor needs to discern the intention of the couple: What commitment are you prepared to make to God, community and each other? Commitment may be the issue. Their will needs to be engaged. A "yes" needs to be said. Thirdly, the pastor can suggest ways to move forward, collaborating with the couple to make intention a reality. Once I had a Bible study with the couple. Every few weeks we got together to learn about the spiritual life. Other times, attending an Alpha course may be appropriate. Perhaps the church needs to help them financially to get a better start. Perhaps we need to marry them in their living room. Perhaps they need to go take some marriage preparation courses. Always they need people who will walk them through this time using a variety of means through which they can grow in grace. We need to ask what are we prepared to do to take this journey with them.

Is it ever right to call them to separate?

Yes. But it is not usually the first step. It is important to have the conversation which explores with them how to make things right. I want any separation to be their decision for the sake of their relationship and their walk with God. I make no demand prior to meaningful and significant conversations. Each circumstance requires discernment. Making things right does not always follow a single path.

The first time when a call to separate is appropriate is where the couple clearly intends their relationship to be temporary. A commitment that is not life-long will impair their spiritual and emotional integrity.

Also there are times of repentance when an appropriate act demonstrating their desire to make things right will lead them to separate prior to the celebration of their commitment. This does not mean a denial of their previous commitment, but a way of walking into a deeper unity of spirit and emotion.

There also may be times when to honour community and family, a separation may be appropriate. Since we are convinced these personal relationships are also public matters, sometimes, to heal the relationship in community, separation may be helpful.

It is always best when the couple themselves discern this. If they do not agree, we need to remember that the central concern is their spiritual well-being. It is not about me (or us) as much as it is about the redemptive work of Christ in their lives.

What about married couples?

The fact is that those living together without a license look at those who are legally married and sometimes find those relationships wanting. There are times when married couples also need to be challenged. I wonder about weddings that take place far from the community or where the blessing of God is not seriously sought. The claims we make for healthy marriages ought to challenge some popular practices.

The goal is to build marriages in which God is honoured and the kingdom advanced. Marriages can be a great gift of God. Troubled marriages and relationships are a great sadness. Our ministry seeks to encourage all to develop their relationships and marriages, deepen our mutual bonds and serve God.

Editor's Note: CC *is grateful to network.crcna.org for permission to share this abridged article by Rev. Neil de Koning. Check the website for the complete article which includes a brief history of marriage and also some valuable thoughts on marriage policies within churches.*

Rev. Neil de Koning is the pastor of Woody Nook CRC in Blackfalds, Alberta. His email address is pastor_neil@woodynookcrc.org.

Features

Thoughts about Islam and Christianity – Part VI

CC continues the discussion of how Christianity and Islam relate to each other in part six of this six-part series. The two participants are John H. Boer and Bert den Boggende, scholars who wrote their answers to each question independently of each other. There may be overlap; there may be differences of opinion. We hope our readers will benefit from this discussion. We also encourage you to join the discussion via letters to the editor (editor@christiancourier.ca) or comments on our website (christiancourier.ca).

Question 6: How can Christians witness effectively to Muslims?

Use an indirect approach

John H. Boer

As last week, I will start with a story of Nigerian wisdom to begin with – this time from a Christian. Pastor Ezekiel Nyajo, who as a young pastor when I arrived in Nigeria in 1966, knew how to keep his audience spellbound. His first charge was the CRC of Ibi, a Muslim town. He enthusiastically began an evangelistic campaign there, by which he soon learned a few important basics – one that he shared with me and that I never forgot: If you wish to evangelize people from another religion, discover the best things and the strengths of that religion and build on them, not on its worst and weakest aspects. I want all you readers to remember that maxim when you approach Muslims. It is true and absolutely necessary to adhere to it.

Secondly, you must be aware that most Muslims have, from their earliest childhood on, been indoctrinated to believe in the absolute superiority of their religion vis a vis all others, including Christianity. Now that may have been true of my generation of CRCers as well, but I sense that a form of humility, true or false, has crept into the hearts and minds of my fellow believers and is advancing among subsequent generations. We tend not to be quite so absolutist about our religion anymore. Without necessarily having thought through the issues arising from such humility, we are slowly sliding into greater openness to other religions. This, you must know, is not the case with Muslims, not even with non-practicing, cultural Muslims. Approaching them is not a hopeless situation, but a positive reception seldom happens in response to direct evangelistic witness. Muslims will hardly give you a chance; they will preach at you without stopping. It is not the way to go.

Two suggestions

If your church wishes to engage in evangelism to Muslims, I recommend two simultaneous approaches, communal and individual:

(1) Employ a spiritually sensitive ex-Muslim who knows Islam well, continues to adhere to much of their culture and has retained his respect and love for Muslims. Let him be your front runner. There may come a time you can invite a group of Muslims for a church or restaurant dinner and be prepared to have it reciprocated.

(2) Befriend Muslims in your community and develop an active and trusting social relationship with them. Demonstrate your Christian way of life and answer any question they may pose, but do not overtly evangelize or witness to them. Feel free to ask them questions in a respectful way. This may encourage them to ask questions as well. Go to a movie together, a meaningful movie. Play chess. Do a picnic. Invite them into your house for a breakfast or dinner. Whatever fits their social life. Remember, often women to women works best and men to men. Keep asking your front runner for information and advice.

Throughout the Muslim world, thousands of Muslims have come to Christ through dreams that are remarkably similar. A white-robed figure tends to appear to them who identifies himself as Christ and invites them to follow him. This is often the result of having heard about Christ through some channel – radio, TV, a book, a conversation that could have been with you. You just sow the seed and leave the harvest to him. Pray, but don't worry about it. He has his own ways.

Transform the West

There is also the global situation that has filled Muslims with mistrust and, often, hatred towards the West and its Christians. We must be aware of the imperialistic way in which the West has treated the Muslim world. The current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are seen as mere continuations of a long imperialist tradition that sought to exploit them and impose secularism on them. Some writers, even in *Christian Courier*, apparently want to ignore or deny the true impact of that history. However, we must not only acknowledge it, but also do all we can to transform our national governments and corporations into peaceful and just directions that are more in conformity with the way of Christ.

Christians must be seen and heard by Muslims to be doing so. At least, if we are interested in correcting the image of Christ that Muslims everywhere have. To Muslims, politics and economics are tools of mission. The Christian dualistic separation of these two is an unbelievably naïve and, pardon the expression, stupid approach. You want to improve the image of Christ in the Muslim world? Then work hard at reforming and transforming our international politics and economics. Witness is no child's play!

John H. Boer is a former Nigeria missionary and author of some 20 books, including the eight-vol., 2700pp. Studies in Christian-Muslim Relations. *His website:* SocialTheology.com. *He lives in Vancouver, B.C.*

Get to know them

Bert den Boggende

There are several different scenarios for witnessing to Muslims, but they all have in common that Christians need to realize that Islam, although not as badly fragmented as Christianity, is deeply divided. Sharia is not everywhere the same, and its explanations depend on different schools. Customs vary from country to country. Historical developments have influenced Islam, at least the way Muslims live their daily lives, in different ways. In previous articles I have tried to show something of these variations. Just as the Pope does not speak for all of Christendom, so an ayatollah does not speak for all of Islam.

Not only do Christians often have wrong ideas about Muslims, but Muslims have often wrong ideas about Christians. Muslims may see the USA as a Christian nation, but, while there are many Christians in that country, the nation is not Christian and never has been. That means that when a Christian meets a Muslim there is probably some degree of suspicion or uncertainty. Before any effective witnessing can take place, Christians should be sensitive to the many differences among Muslims and at least know something about those differences as well as the basic ideas.

Scenario 1

When I arrived in Trenton, Ontario, in 1967, all my students had Dutch names and attended the Christian Reformed Church. In their daily life quite a few rarely encountered anyone else outside their school and church environment. For their parents the situation was often little different. Today such a situation may be somewhat different, but I suspect that many Christians don't often come into contact with Muslims. They have to make a conscious effort to meet them, and that, perhaps, means getting out of their comfort zone.

Here in Brooks, Alberta, there are quite a few new arrivals from Muslim countries and they need help to adjust to the new life in Canada. One way to meet these Muslims is to help them become acquainted with their new environment through language tutoring and going with them to stores and various services. During this learning experience, more than likely from both sides, there may be an opportunity to discuss customs and perhaps even faith matters. But before that can happen, some trust must have been established. There must be a willingness on both sides to listen to each other. Although we don't have the task to convert them, we can at least help to get rid of wrong notions. It should be kept in mind that this tutoring is meant in the first place to help these newcomers adjust to Canadian life. Helping them is a form of witnessing; being able to discuss customs and faith is an added bonus. Another possible way to meet Muslims is by attending meetings in which various speakers explain their faith.

Scenario 2

One year after moving to Brooks, I got new neighbours, a married couple originally from Iraq. It was extremely difficult to make a conversation with the wife for two reasons: she spoke little English and, for her, it was inappropriate to speak to a male. It was somewhat easier to talk to her husband, but on the whole it remained difficult.

The difference with Scenario 1 is that one does not have to go out of one's way to meet Muslims since they are part of one's daily environment. As my own limited experience indicates, the difficulties are not immediately resolved, but it is easier to become acquainted. It may be possible to invite them to a barbeque and thus establish some kind of relationship. Only after establishing such a relationship, is it possible to discuss more than weather, sports and work. The priority would be that we show that we care about them.

Scenario 3

One argument for sending Christian children to a public school has been that they can witness to non-Christians. While I am not totally convinced about the argument, students in such a mixed environment definitely have such an opportunity. For a number of years I have had opportunity to substitute in the public school system in Brooks, mostly at the high school. From my observations, admittedly limited, I have not seen many Christians associating with Muslims. It seems to me that especially Muslim girls associate nearly exclusively with each other, while the boys seem to integrate somewhat easier.

While Muslims are generally accepted, as far as I can tell, Christian boys and girls don't seem to go out of their way to associate with Muslims. I wonder if parents can encourage their children to become acquainted with them. Like their parents, children may have to make a special effort.

Bert den Boggende is a retired teacher with a PhD in history. He lives in Brooks, Alberta.

Features

Intangible Things

Heidi Vander Slikke

No time like the present

On my sixth birthday my parents gave me a brand new Timex wristwatch. Pa strapped it to my left arm. I admired its gleaming white face, gold-coloured trim and stylish black leather band. A glorious sense of maturity washed over me.

"This is not a toy," he said solemnly. Then he explained how to read the time. Mind boggling! How could a single device track so much information? Seconds, minutes, hours – suddenly my shiny birthday gift became some kind of sneaky arithmetic lesson.

"Don't touch this little knob. I will wind your watch for you every day," he said. And then the final blow – henceforth I would be expected home "on time." Growing up came with a price.

Punctuality mattered to my father. He arrived home every afternoon at 4:45. Supper was served at precisely 5:30 p.m. I was to be sitting in my chair and ready to eat by 5:29. So far my excuse was that I didn't know the exact time as I played outside, especially if I happened to be at the neighbour's house.

I now discovered that time moved rapidly when I was having fun with my friends, and faster still when I was running home trying to be at the table on time. Daily I arrived five or six minutes late for supper, much to my father's annoyance. Despite numerous lectures and the assurance that it was okay to arrive a few minutes early, the problem persisted.

One evening he said nothing upon my entrance, despite my sincerest apologies. We ate in silence. Then he took my watch and wound it. He handed it back and stared at me with his steel blue eyes. Speaking softly but sternly, he said, "People who always show up late disrespect those waiting for them."

John and Maria on February 14, 1951.

I never, ever intended to disrespect my dad. I vowed to improve.

. The next evening I burst through the door, late as usual, apologies bubbling forth, only to discover no one was yet seated. Pa had a little grin on his face. I sat down, waiting for trouble. He never said a word.

I could stand it no longer. "How come we're eating late?"

"We're not," he said.

I looked at my watch. It was 5:40.

"I set your watch ten minutes ahead last night," he said with satisfaction.

When I figured out what that actually meant, I was duly outraged.

"You tricked me!" I cried indignantly.

"Yes. And I proved that if you can be five minutes late every day, you could also be five minutes early."

He reset my watch to the correct time only after I promised to reform. Then he promised that if I failed, painful consequences would follow. Since he was a man of his word, I decided I had better keep mine.

So began my lifelong quest to manage time.

Generally I arrive for appointments, church services, or meetings a few minutes early. However I still habitually cram every waking hour with sixty-five minutes' worth of activities, causing myself much unnecessary tension.

As for regular monthly tasks, such as paying bills or submitting a column, I confess, I need an imminent deadline for motivation. I don't purposely procrastinate. I simply maintain an overly full schedule.

Meanwhile, the days, months and years blow by me until every once in awhile I'm astonished that whole decades have passed. Last week I ran off invitations to celebrate my in-laws' sixtieth wedding anniversary. (See the classifieds.) And I suddenly realized it's been 10 whole years since we marked their fiftieth. How is this possible?

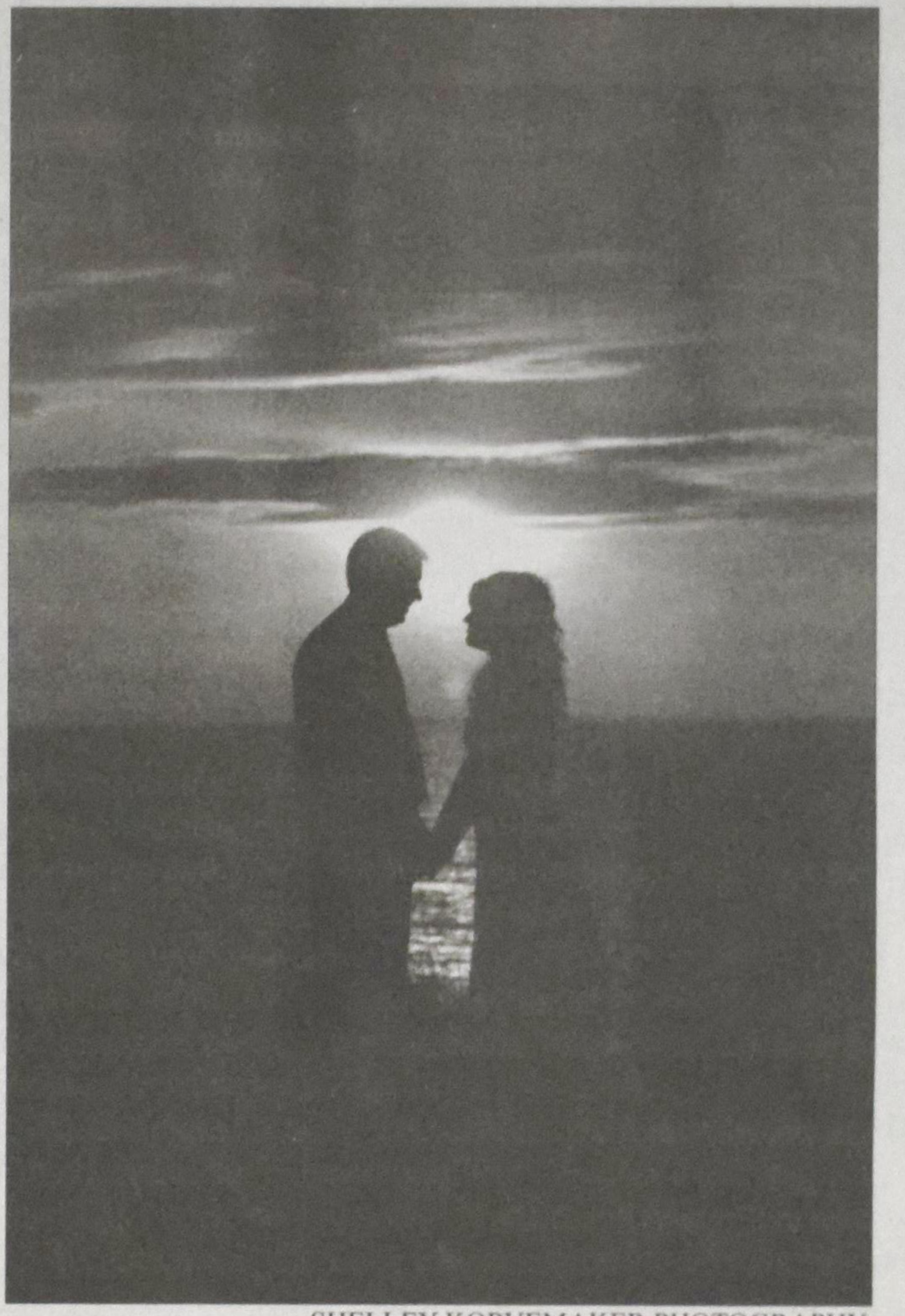
C.S. Lewis suggests we grapple with time because we are not really designed to live in it. He writes, "Do fish complain of the sea being wet? Or if they did, would that fact suggest that they had not always or would not always be purely aquatic creatures? Notice how we are perpetually surprised at time. . . . In heaven's name why? Unless, indeed, there is something about us that is not temporal."

How do infinite creatures cope with the constraints of time? Maybe Mom and Dad's wedding text holds a clue: "The LORD goes with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you."

Our family hopes to celebrate several milestones this year. In addition to the anniversary, our youngest turns 25, our twins turn 30, Mom turns 80. Jack's age added to mine will total 110. (I know. We don't look that old!) Through it all, God is with us and he is faithful. Time is only a tool in his hands. Someday there won't be a clock or a calendar to worry about anymore. For now, we have all these blessings to count. No time like the present to get started.

Heidi Vander Slikke (hmvanderslikke@hotmail.com) lives in Harriston, Ontario.

Artful Eye



SHELLEY KORVEMAKER PHOTOGRAPHY

For Kathy

A Sonnet

In those moments, when your sweet eyes light up,
when laughter bubbles deep inside your throat,
your smile lies warm, like tea inside a cup.
You are ocean where I would drift and float.
If I begin to drown and flail about,
should ancient fears quick grab and hold my heart,
should I sink slow, my mind a sea of doubt,
then you'd be sail, my compass, and my chart,
for I see starlight twinkling in your eyes,
a luminescent moon upon your lips.
You are surface above my frightened cries,
a breath of love my fears cannot eclipse.
At last, though all the swirling currents shift,
deep in your love, I find God's gracious gift.

Rod Hugen and his wife, Kathy, live in Tucson, Arizona. Rod is a pastor at The Village and also a church planter working for Classis Arizona (CRC).

SHELLEY KORVEMAKER PHOTOGRAPHY

Shelley Korvemaker is a volunteer soccer coach and photographer. She and her husband, Doug, and their three children are members of the Wyoming CRC.

Columns

My Window Seat
Mendelt Hoekstra

Facing down 'the talk'

One of my eight-year old sons came home from school and asked me "Dad, is Mom hot?"

Stay calm Mendelt, don't overreact. You may have to start the sex talk.

"Tell me more, what do you mean?" I asked.

He replied, "At school, I heard some boys talking about a girl and they said she was hot. What does that mean?"

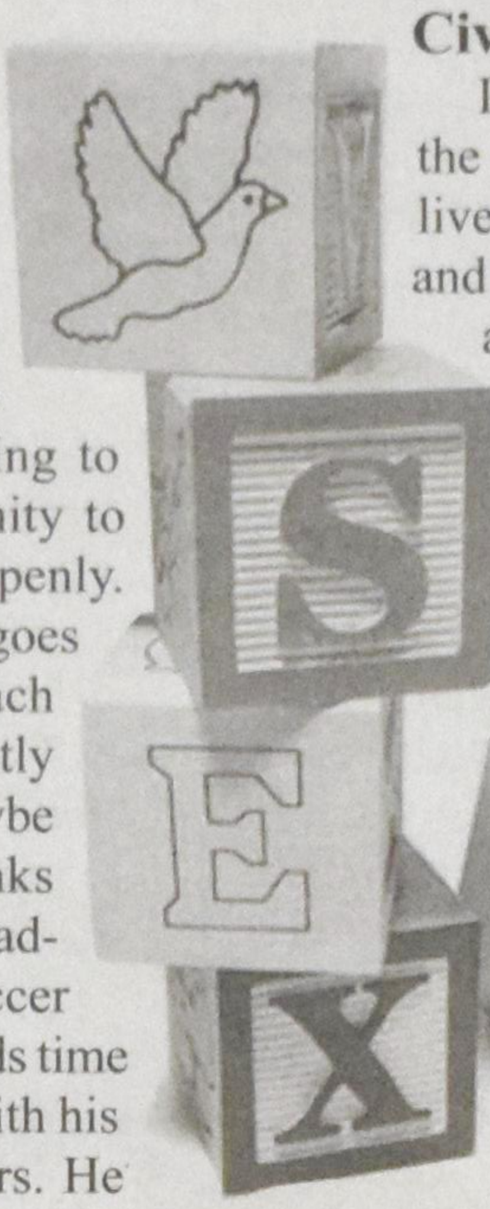
That's it, I'm homeschooling or you are going to a different school. We can't have you hanging around with boys talking about girls this way . . . wait; you go to a good Christian School. That's good. That's a perfect place to discuss these unavoidable issues. You are staying at that school. I'm glad you are at that school.

"What do you think hot means?" I asked.

"I think it means if a girl is pretty or sexy," he shyly replied.

Sexy!?!? You are EIGHT YEARS OLD, how do you even know that word? Are you being sexualized so early? Where is this coming from? What am I supposed to do? Okay Mendelt, here is your chance, instil wisdom, teach respect, do it. You can do it. Holy Spirit, give me the words.

To describe a girl as "hot" is a common term among kids. The website urbandictionary.com defines "hot" as "someone who is sexually attractive." I quickly entered an internal debate. While I wanted to avoid this question and redirect him to things that I thought a "regular" eight-year old should be thinking about, I also was appreciative and thankful that he was coming to me and giving me an opportunity to connect, shepherd and speak openly. And as most things in our world goes faster than previous years and each generation learns things differently than the previous generation, maybe a "regular" eight-year old thinks about this stuff. He sees cheerleaders at sports events, he plays soccer in a public house league, he spends time at community events, he talks with his buddies, and he has two brothers. He also sees the open way our society will put up a billboard of a scantily clad woman without hesitation and how our culture has become so sex-focused that our radio advertisements will try to sell tires through sexual innuendos. Maybe I had a chance that some fathers don't – a chance to open the discussion when the child wants to talk about it.



Civility counts

I figured that I needed to embrace the idea that our sons and daughters live in a culture that flaunts sexuality and the idea of sex before marriage is archaic. That they will most likely live with us for a short decade before they go and make decisions on their own.

I tried to remember when I started to think about words like "hot" and "sexy." I remember when I was 12, I came home from the shopping mall, walked into my house and proudly announced to my brother that it was amazing how many "chicks" (a slang word for good looking girls) were at the mall. My mom made it very clear that if I was to use that term, I better be talking about little chickens.

"Do you think Mom is pretty?" I asked.

"Yeah, totally," he said.

I told him that God has a certain way he wants things to happen in life, a specific plan where one thing needs to follow another. We crawl before we walk; we walk before we run. He also has a certain way he wants us to look at girls and women. We do unto others as we would have others do unto us. We respect everyone before we even look at them. We treat every girl and woman like she is our grandmother; we open doors for them, look them in the eye when talking to them and we offer help when they need it. And I told him, do your best to be nice to girls, because one day, some day, you will need one of them.

His face soured. He wasn't convinced. I asked him if there are any nice, pretty girls in his class. He said, "Gross, no way."

Phew, he's a regular eight-year old.

Mendelt Hoekstra (mendelt.hoekstra@gmail.com) is the director of the Music Therapy Program at Bethesda, an organization that supports adults with developmental possibilities. He lives near St. Catharines, Ont. with his wife and five children.

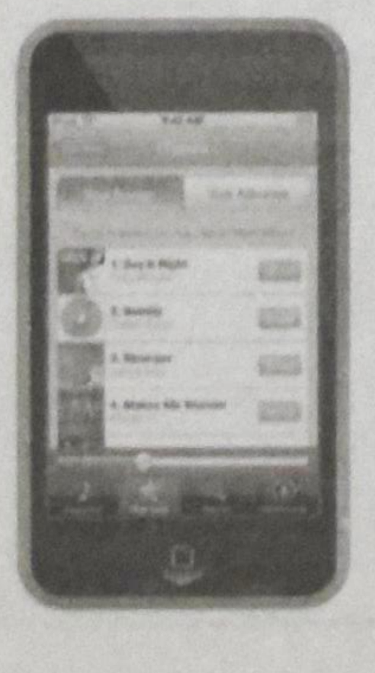
Toddlers to Teens
Denise Dykstra

Picking out the undertones: Musical discernment for teens

I have 33 songs on my iPod. My 12-year-old daughter has 100 songs. My teenage kids have 273 and 968 songs respectively. The number of songs my children own doesn't surprise me, but it does alarm me. Most of what they listen to I've never even heard.

It wasn't always like this, of course. My husband and I used to be very diligent parents when it came to music. When our oldest child, Sean, got his first MP3 player, it came with conditions. He could put a song on it only if he printed off the lyrics beforehand – and only if we approved the words and their message.

Unfortunately, as with many things, Ray and I became less attentive to music over time. Too many kids, too many songs – it all became too much. We got lazy. And truth be told, we didn't often think about what our kids were listening to. They never played their tunes out loud around the house; they played them in their ears. Most of the time we aren't even aware their music is on.



Inspired by the right things

I'm not making excuses and I'm definitely not proud of this. I know it's our job as parents to be mindful of the things that go into our children's heads. After all, nobody else is going to do it for us. That became clear recently when our country's broadcast watchdog received its *first* complaint about a certain song – after it had already been on the radio for *25 years*.

Last month the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council responded to a complaint about the Dire Straits hit "Money for Nothing" by ruling it violated the industry's code of ethics for containing an offensive word in its lyrics. The song was deemed unfit for Canadian radio. The public outcry that followed was interesting, but I was more interested in the fact that it took only one complaint to set such a change in motion. One complaint. That means that in a country of more than 33,000,000 people not a single person formally objected to this offensive lyric in *two and a half decades* of airtime. Regardless of whether or not we believe the song should be banned, this lack of response is enough to tell us that we parents are on our own when it comes to monitoring the music our kids listen to.

Music is powerful because it can change the way a person thinks and feels. That's why songs like "We are the Champions" and "We Will Rock You" are often played at sporting events. They're inspiring. But that's also why we should stay on top of what our kids download onto their iPods. We don't want our impressionable adolescents to be "inspired" by lyrics that can be harmful to them.

Potent playlists

Our children may be too young to realize it, but a lot of songs today feature destructive themes. Some glamorize drug and alcohol abuse, some degrade women and minorities, some are full of graphic violence. And while most listeners will never take action on the harmful messages they ingest, all listeners will eventually become desensitized to those messages. And that puts them at risk of lower inhibitions.

Parents who stay involved in their children's music can play a critical role in determining what does, or doesn't, influence their kids. Parents who pay attention to their children's purchasing, downloading and listening patterns can help their kids identify music that may be destructive – as well as songs that may be uplifting. In doing so they can encourage their kids to seek out lyrics that glorify God, and to look for themes that reinforce their faith rather than reduce it.

A good place to start: download your children's music onto your own iPod. Or play their songs while you're in a vehicle. That way, when something catches your attention, you're in a space to start a discussion.

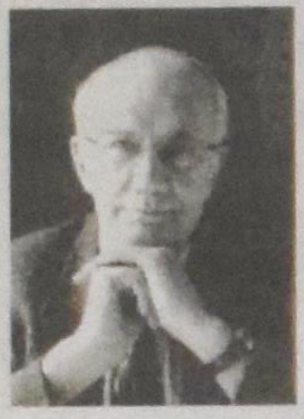
Do this often enough and eventually you'll be able to come up with a set of musical standards acceptable to you and your children. This is much wiser than setting principles on your own and expecting them to be followed. Kids like to be challenged. They're more likely to follow rules they've had a hand in creating. And who knows, maybe in the process you'll find you should be making a few changes to your own playlist.

Denise Dykstra (dykstras@telus.net) lives in Edmonton, Alberta. She's a writer and mother of five.

Columns

The Public Square
Harry Antonides

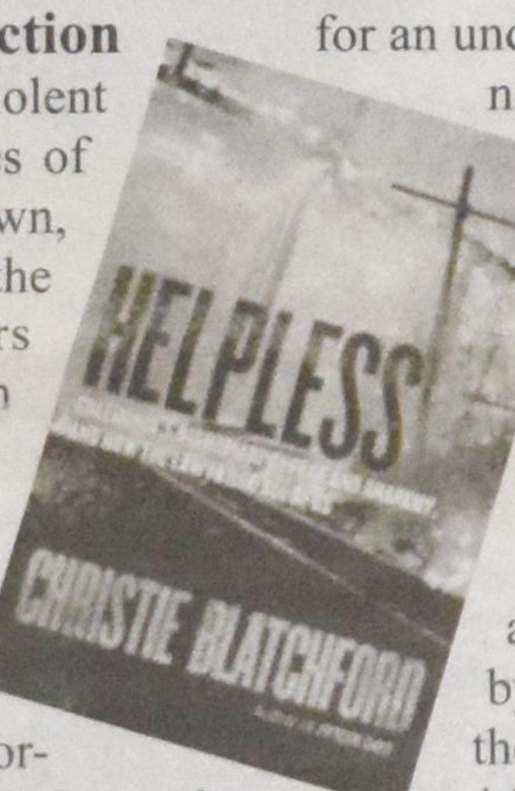
Helpless and betrayed in Caledonia



A recent book by Christie Blatchford, *Helpless: Caledonia's Nightmare of Fear and Anarchy, and How the Law Failed All of Us*, was controversial even before it came out. She describes in detail the disastrous consequences of treating the Caledonia conflict as a peace-making rather than a law enforcement task. Before February 28, 2006, residents had enjoyed a peaceful existence with the nearby native population of Six Nations. That ended when several protesters from the Six Nations reserve blocked all construction crews from entering Douglas Creek Estates. Henco Industries Ltd. had purchased this 40-ha plot of land from the province and had begun building houses on the residential subdivision. The Six Nations, however, claimed that they still were the legal owners of this land.

Political correctness in action

Thus began a period of violent incidents that turned the lives of many Caledonians upside down, especially those working on the DCE subdivision and others whose houses bordered on these contested grounds – some 450 households. The "occupiers" blocked major roadways, burned a small bridge, destroyed a hydro substation, and generally terrorized the nearby population. In June, the protesters verbally abused an elderly couple, Kathe and Gunther Golke, and tried to destroy their car. Mr. Golke, who is a diabetic and has a history of heart problems, required hospitalization.



A two-man television crew was attacked and its film stolen. One of them (Nick Garbutt) was beaten on the head and required hospital treatment. In both instances, Ontario Provincial Police officers were close by, but refused to stop the attackers or charge them with a criminal offence. On the same day native protesters swarmed a U.S. Border Patrol vehicle, attacked its occupants, and drove off in the vehicle after attempting to run down an OPP officer, Norman Ormerod. He was seriously hurt, and never returned to work.

The Canadian Advocates for Charter Equality (CANACE), led by the outspoken critic of the OPP Gary McHale, has done a good job of exposing the OPP's double standard to natives and non-natives. All of this material is now readily available on the Internet and has become an important source of information about these events that, in a real way, affect all of us, especially our children and grandchildren.

McHale writes that it is easy to overlook the impact of the occupation by native protesters on individuals and families in places such as Ipperwash and Caledonia. But the victims of land claim lawlessness need to be heard so that "the people of Ontario can see that it is not just land that is being argued about, but the very lives of average people who, through no fault of their own, have become pawns in a violent movement to force a political agenda."

Living under siege

One couple, Dave Brown and Dana Chatwell who lived next door to the occupied DCE, suffered endless humiliation and interruption of their daily lives. Their calls for help to the OPP were not answered. Instead the OPP sided with the attackers and blamed Brown and Chatwell for their troubles. Brown was arrested and jailed overnight once, although he was not charged with any offence. In utter frustration the couple started a lawsuit, which ended with their house being bought by the province for an undisclosed amount, after which the new owners promptly destroyed it. The province, instead of insisting that everyone abide by the law, accommodated the natives by buying out the owners of the DCE.

CANACE has gathered the testimony of many people who endured endless harassment and threats and who feel betrayed by the authorities' refusal to apply the law equally to all. As one young girl describes, "I was terrified even to look out of my own window. Gates were everywhere; men with masks over their faces only to see their eyes; men holding bats, some even with guns. You don't have any clue what life was like until you've had to live through it."

McHale and his associates deserve our deepest gratitude for speaking out about one of today's most significant political issues. The irony is that instead of gratitude, he has been ridiculed and demonized. Former OPP Commissioner Julian Fantino has publicly accused McHale of being the cause of all the problems in Caledonia. That is Fantino's way of blaming the victims and thereby justifying his leadership of the police that, in fact, gave the lawbreakers and terrorists a free hand.

Make no mistake, what is happening in Caledonia, and in many other places where the natives' lawlessness and violence is tolerated, will only encourage the lawbreakers, demoralize the conscientious police officers, and generally serve to undermine respect for lawful authority. Wake up Canada.

Harry Antonides (hantonides@sympatico.ca) retired as director of the former Work Research Foundation. He lives in Willowdale, Ont.

Country Living
Meindert Vander Galien

Literary giant still associated with lettuce and fish

Next time you buy a head of lettuce or a bag of ready-to-eat salad, check the bag to see if it was grown in John Steinbeck Country – Salinas, California. It probably was.

The Salinas Valley in Monterey County is known as the "Salad Bowl of the World." I was surprised to see huge billboards among the lettuce fields with the famous novelist's name in big letters. You couldn't miss the fact that you were in John Steinbeck Country.

Steinbeck is one of my favourite novelists. If his books don't ring a bell, you may be familiar with the books that were made into movies – 15, I think.

There is *East of Eden*, which is James Dean's film debut. *Grapes of Wrath* with Henry Fonda, *Tortilla Flats*, starring Spencer Tracey, and Debra Winger in *Cannery Row*. Who can forget the sad ending in *Of Mice and Men*? There is the 1939 film with Burgess Meredith and the 1992 one with John Malkovich.

John Steinbeck was born in 1902 in Salinas, California. He received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962. A heavy smoker all his life, he died in 1968.

Steinbeck's stomping grounds

When my wife and I toured California this past October, I asked our driver to take us through the Salinas Valley to see fields of produce and flowers of every colour.

It's a funny sight seeing portable toilets (outhouses) – the same size and colour as the ones you see here parked at outdoor events – parked at roadways in fields of lettuce. Some portable toilets sit on a wagon, three to a wagon, and are pulled to wherever the workers are planting or harvesting produce. There are miles and miles of produce growing in the area east of Monterey Bay.

We saw the National Steinbeck Center in Salinas and the house where Steinbeck lived. We drove by the huge wooden buildings on Cannery Row, a waterfront street in Monterey. Sardine fishing and canning were the major industry in the mid-1930s, when 19 canneries lined the bay for a mile. By 1950 the sardines had disappeared – into cans – and the canneries closed. Steinbeck made Monterey famous. It's interesting to note that Robert Louis Stevenson also lived in Monterey (late 1880s).

Steinbeck certainly lived in a picturesque area of California. Seventeen Mile Drive to Pebble Beach on the Monterey Peninsula is an amazing drive, as is the 21-Mile Scenic Route. Nearby is the 550-ft concrete arch bridge known as Bixby Bridge. It was opened in 1932 and spans deep gorges on the Pacific Highway overlooking the ocean. The bridge is a photographer's dream. We stopped to view the incredible scenery and take photos of the bridge.

MEINDERT VAN DER GALIEN

Bixby bridge near Monterey and Big Sur, California.

Also in the area is Hearst Castle. In 1957 the Hearst family donated the property to the state of California. The castle, barely visible from the highway, sits on a 1,600-ft high hill and is surrounded by dry and brown ranch land. Despite its remote location, the site attracts roughly one million visitors per year. You can't drive up to the castle – only bus tours go. I found it a very strange place for such a magnificent castle.

The road to Eden

The Pacific Coast highway is considered America's most famous highway. It's scary at times and not for the faint-hearted as drivers navigate around blind hairpin switchback curves atop very steep ledges and high cliffs that overlook the ocean. You don't see tour buses and large vehicles on the road – they can't negotiate the curves. The road is very well maintained. The speed limit on the switchback curves is 10-15 mph.

Not only do you have to watch for deer and elk crossing the road; there are also signs making motorists aware that there could be cows grazing along the road and rock slides in places. We saw no rocks or boulders on the road but did see two black cows. The highway and coastal area is often fogged in. One section of road near The Big Sur has Texas gates in the highway (steel bars in the road allowing vehicles to cross but not cattle) and a wire fence attached to the gatepost on both sides. Cattle break out from the poorly fenced ranches on the dry hills and mountain ranges. Cattle that do break out are confined to the area between the road gates.

Meindert van der Galien (maynard@renfrew.net) is a Renfrew, Ontario, farmer. He enjoyed the Pacific Coast drive very much. Oregon has no sales tax.

Classifieds

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Job Opportunities
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Please contact Larry Vandergrift at
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for a job description and further information.
Deadline: February 28, 2011

Covenant CRC
in Woodstock, ON
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to join our Spirit-led Youth Ministry team.

For more more information including a job description please contact
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Christian Labour Association of Canada

Career Opportunity:
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The Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC) is accepting applications for a labour representative position working out of its Fort St. John office in order to service a growing provincial membership in North Eastern B.C.

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More information on CLAC can be found at www.clac.ca.

For further information, contact David Prentice, Provincial Director, at 1-800-331-2522 or dprentice@clac.ca.

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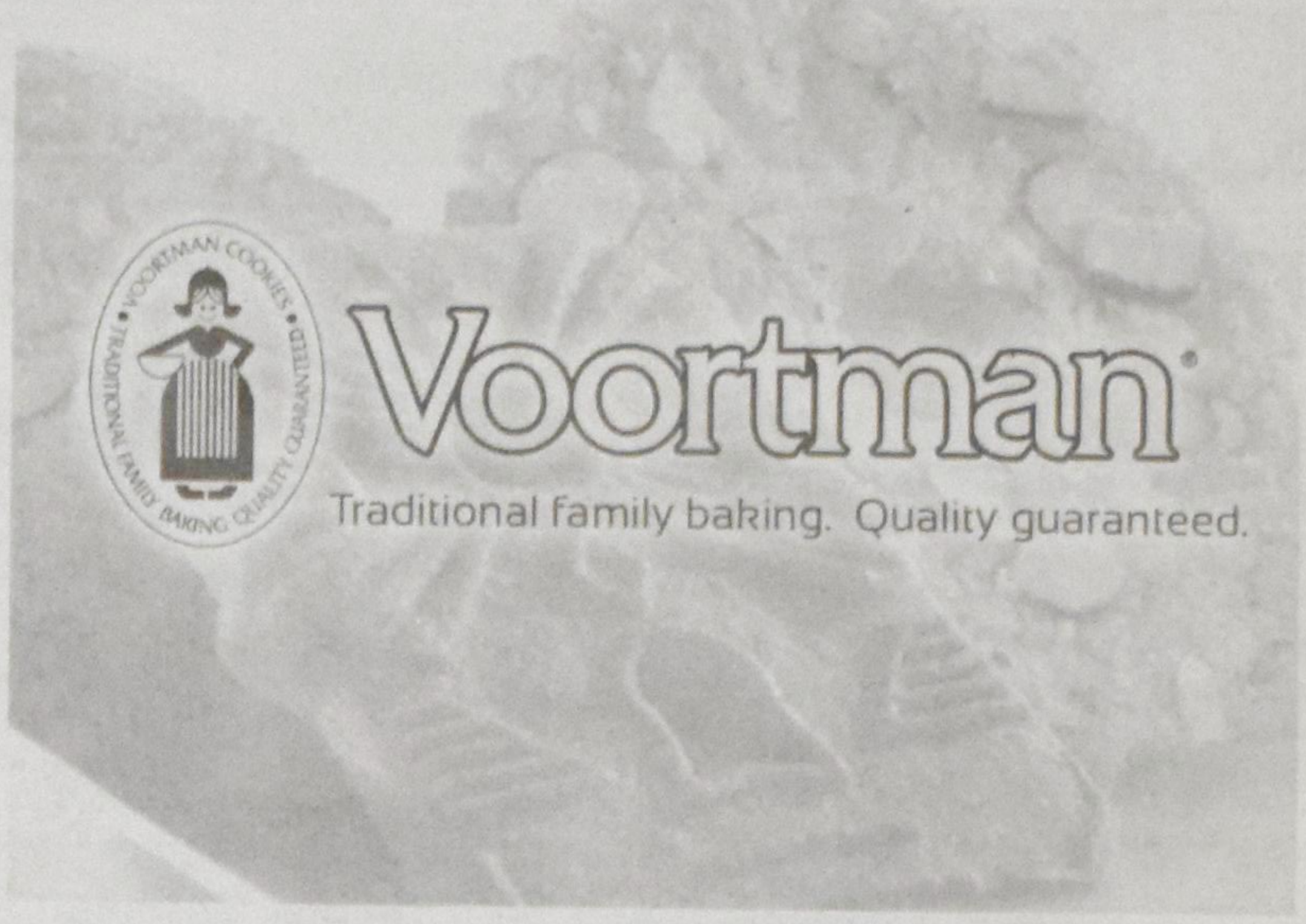

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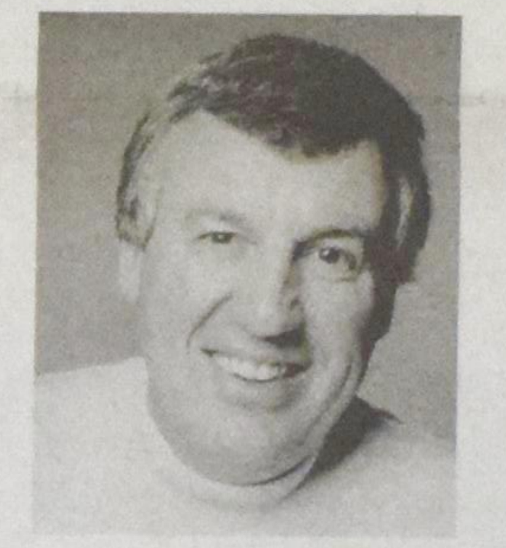

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Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Feb 18-20 Marriage Encounter weekend. **St. Catharines,** Register at reformedme.org

Feb 27 - Dutch Service will be held in the Ancaster Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Ralph Koops will be preaching.

Mar 11-12 The Woodstock Dutch Theatre group presents *Vell kabaal op 'Clingendael'* Market Centre Theatre, **Woodstock.** See ad p.16

Mar 19 The Woodstock Dutch Theatre group presents *Vell kabaal op 'Clingendael'*, **Blyth**, Ont. See ad p.16

Mar 25 The Woodstock Dutch Theatre group presents *Vell kabaal op 'Clingendael'*, **London**, Ont at 8 pm. See ad p.16

Apr 9 The Woodstock Dutch Theatre group presents *Vell kabaal op 'Clingendael'* **Beamsville**, Ont. See ad p.16

Apr 8-10 Marriage Encounter weekend. **London, Ont**. Register at reformedme.org

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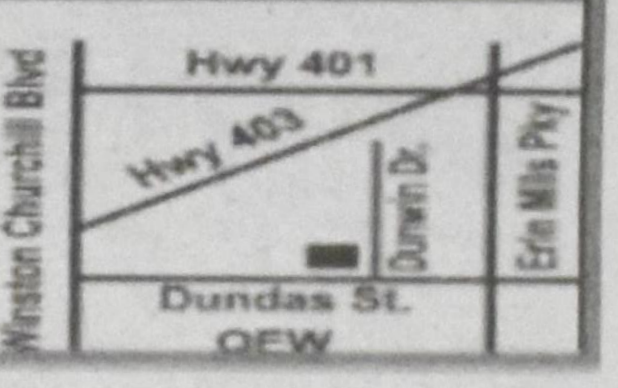

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